

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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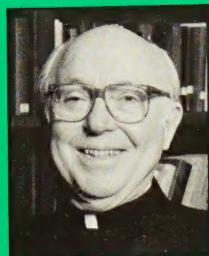


Message to Postmodern Leaders



The Homosexuality Debate

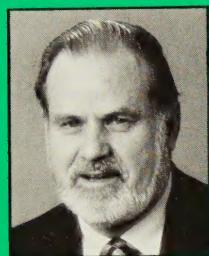
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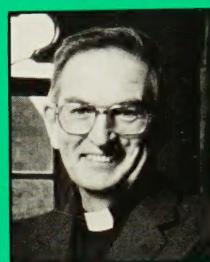
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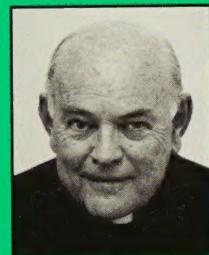
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HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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EDITOR'S PAGE

HEARTS YEARNING FOR THE HEROIC

Among the many disturbing aspects of the current sexual abuse crisis in the American church, one strikes me as requiring an urgent and concerted response that I have not yet heard suggested. Efforts have been made to bring nonoffending priests together to ventilate their anger and humiliation; bishops have met to take steps that might restore trust and confidence in their leadership; parishioners have assembled to formulate recommendations for improvement in the church's way of dealing with victims of abuse; and seminary administrators have begun to devise ways to prevent high-risk candidates from gaining admission and passing through their program leading to ordination. But aside from promoting the idea that priesthood should be opened to women and married individuals, no one has as yet proposed a plan—as far as I know—that will compensate for the long-term damage being done to the priestly vocations God is presumably trying to enkindle these days in the hearts of boys and young men.

Researchers conducting studies of vocations to the priesthood have repeatedly found that most of the clergy, when they were just children, began to watch closely the behavior of priests they strongly admired and then gradually developed a desire to become priests like them. During subsequent years, they heard their parents speak of the incomparable career a priest enjoys in the service of God and the church, and of the blessing experienced by the parents of a son fortunate enough to be "called." Finally, their attraction to the priesthood was reinforced in proportion to the amount of respect, admiration, and gratitude they saw manifested by parishioners, teachers, and others around them in the ways those individuals spoke about and related to the priests who played a pastoral role in their lives.

All too obviously, this normal, providential progression in the genesis of a priest's vocation is being interrupted these days as children in families throughout the country repeatedly hear their parents, relatives, and neighbors angrily express their shock, disillusionment, and resentment in reaction to the sinful, criminal, and pathological behavior of hundreds of abuser-priests and to the insensitive, self-serving, and culpable coverup perpetuated by a number of their bishops. What boy, exposed day after day to the criticism and condemnation of priests heard everywhere, could conceivably develop a burning desire to become one? What parents could possibly communicate to their sons the message that they would regard it as an incomparable blessing in their lives if they were to see their boy leave home to study in the seminary for priesthood?

Of course, not all parents and others are loudly finding fault with the clergy and hierarchy. But so many are, and their voices are coming across so deafeningly through the media, that the image of a vocation to the priesthood is bound to lose its luster for countless boys and young men who might otherwise have climbed through the stages of "being called" just described.

So is there anything that we can do right now to prevent these potential vocations from being spoiled at the start? There are undoubtedly a number of actions we could take, but at the moment I would prefer to suggest just one. It amounts to learning a lesson from what we have seen happening in this country in connection with the heroic events that occurred in the midst of horror on September 11 at the World Trade Center, at the Pentagon, and in western Pennsylvania. Studies reveal that the bravery of firefighters, police officers, and emergency workers, so vividly illustrated in the media and praised universally in pulpits and in homes, is already prompting children to want precisely these careers for themselves "when they grow up," especially because of the good they would be able to do for others.

Those September 11 demonstrations of heroic performance of duty took place in high-risk situations, in which men and women dedicated to pursuing the values associated with their professions chose to face the prospect of personal suffering, injury, and even death in order to protect the well-being of others. Each fulfilled the definition offered by philosopher Andrew Bernstein: "A hero is an individual of elevated moral stature and superior ability who pursues his goals indefatigably in the face of powerful antagonist(s)."

One example: Father Mychal Judge, chaplain of the New York City Fire Department, gave his life while ministering to the injured and dying that day. This Franciscan friar's death brought attention to his character and vocation, which have been memorialized in the book *One Nation: America Remembers September 11, 2001*. His "daily mission" is reported there as "involving not only firemen, but New York's homeless, immigrants, prisoners, AIDS sufferers, addicts." He is described as "a priest for all people," and his career is summarized in these words: "His was a vocation for a hero."

It seems to me that we can do something effective to promote and protect early-stage vocations to the priesthood among boys and young men by helping them to view this way of life and loving service as a calling to heroism. Admit to them that not all priests, as our current crisis shows, are capable of heroism—but neither are all police officers or firefighters. A career spent constantly pursuing and protecting God's blessings for one's fellow men and women, even while experiencing frequent misunderstandings, opposition, and criticism, deserves to be praised by parents and others within the hearing of the young. They are waiting to be taught to understand Maya Angelou's tribute to heroism in her poem *Extravagant Spirits*: "Pastors and priests / These Rabbis, Imams, and gurus, / Teach us by their valor and mold us with their courage. / Without their fierce devotion / We are only forlorn and only fragile / Stumbling briefly, among the stars."



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.
Editor-in-Chief

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Witnessing to What?

George B. Wilson, S.J.

In this piece I will reflect on two different modes of living community as vowed religious. One is the more prevalent practice of living together under a common roof. The other involves members of the order or congregation participating in the life and mission of the group while living under separate roofs. The second mode may consist in the province of a congregation formally treating as a single community a collection of religious who live within a single geographic territory but in separate residences. That modality has been common for some time in women's communities and has recently increased in men's provinces. Or the second mode may simply involve recognizing individual members living under a separate roof as belonging to the wider congregational community.

Readers of this journal will probably have experienced the contentiousness that frequently characterizes conversations about these realities. For that reason, it is not easy to find nonprejudicial terminology to name them. Does one designate the two variations as "living together" and "living apart"? Or do we use other commonly used expressions: that some people live "in community" and others live "outside" or "away" or "independently" or "on their own," or even "alone"? It should not require inordinate honesty to recognize that each of these phrases may have its

origins in subtle or not so subtle biases, usually tilted against the acceptability of the less prevalent model ("Why don't they come back to community?").

The only specific reality that clearly and necessarily distinguishes one of these modalities from the other, regardless of anyone's ideological commitment, would seem to be the matter of the roof over the members' heads. Regardless of what one may think or believe about the appropriateness (or even the validity) of some of these arrangements, the simple fact is that in one case the roof shelters more than one person, and in the other it protects only one. For that reason I have opted in this article to speak simply of the one-roof community as distinct from the multiple-roof community. The terminology may be a bit awkward, but it has two redeeming characteristics. It keeps our reflection grounded in behavioral reality, and precisely because it is not common parlance, it may open up fresh perspectives and thereby help us to frame better questions and even new insights.

It is not my intention to advocate for either one of these ways of being-in-community over the other. My aim is, rather, to reflect on one—and only one—particular aspect that is frequently adduced as an argument for the single-roof mode of community living: the witness it gives to the people of God and, indeed, to the "world."

In the interest of helping the reader to weigh the impact of my own unconscious ideological biases, as well as in an effort to uncover them in myself, I need to note my credentials for entering upon the subject at all. For the first 26 years of my life as a Jesuit, I lived in one-roof-communities. There were the large houses of formation and study for the pre-Vatican II Jesuits, including the reality of residing in one building with as many as 300 Scholastics. Then there was a smaller higher-education community of 30 to 40 men. A brief stint of one year was spent living in a student residence at a slight physical remove from "the main community" but with expectations of daily participation in some common prayer and socializing. Later, I spent two years in a small 11-member community of priests and Scholastics, with common duties of cooking and upkeep of the residence. For the past 29 years I have lived under a roof that shelters only myself, while being canonically a member of a community nearby, the majority of whose members reside under a single roof.

The result is that after many years of reflecting and praying over the differences in these two styles and the kinds of spiritual, psychological, and even physical issues each one entails, I have much to say about the relative benefits and stresses each one brings to the individual who may live in it, as well as to others in the same community. The literature on religious community living is, of course, voluminous (what does it mean that we have to talk about it so much?). Others have written much on these matters, though perhaps not explicitly contrasting the implications of the two different modalities for the persons of the individual religious living them out. Someday I may be tempted to add yet more words on that subject in the light of my own history and experience of living under both modalities. In any case, the internal realities are not our concern right now. At the moment we are talking about witness, which presumably involves symbolizing something to outsiders.

WHERE DOES WITNESS HAPPEN?

Before we consider the witness value of a residence containing many vowed religious, we may need to take one step back and remind ourselves that what religious people call witness is a subset of the broader reality called communication. To make the point in a slightly facetious manner, we might imagine a person alone on a desert island, proclaiming to the winds, "I am an extraordinary witness to evangelical poverty!" The only true comment to be made about such a scene is that the person is perilously out of touch with reality. There is no witnessing going on, because there is no recipient of the message suppos-

edly being proclaimed.

Communication (and, therefore, witness) happens in the mind or spirit of the one who receives it, not in the intention of the one who believes he or she is communicating. To quote the wise insight with which Scholasticism anticipated the McLuhanesque "discovery" of our contemporary era of communications, "*quidquid recipitur recipitur secundum modum recipientis.*" A message is effectively sent when it resides in the receiver, and what is actually transmitted depends on the meaning the receiver gives it, on the basis of the receiver's internal screens or lenses. If I were to write this article in Urdu, most readers would effectively be precluded from receiving it, and the loss of communication would be due not to my spiritual shortcomings or to the readers' degree of receptivity to my message, but simply to the lack of receptors to take in the message.

I offer a true story that may fix the point in the reader's memory. Father John Courtney Murray once gave a lecture, after which there was a question-and-answer period. A woman put up her hand and said, "Father Murray, in your talk, were you really saying such-and-so?" To which Murray, all six-foot-three of him, looking through his rimless glasses in his courtly but friendly fashion, responded, "Madam, I don't know what I said until I know what you heard."

IT'S TRUE OF "WITNESS," TOO

If we then turn to that particular form of communications we call witness, the insight remains just as true. Whether witness happens or not depends on the reception in the witnesses; the pious wish or intention of the witnessers is quite irrelevant. In Gumpian terms, we might say that witness is as witness does.

The net result is that if we want to find out just what is witnessed to by the fact that a group of religious live under the same roof, the belief of the religious that they are witnessing to something is the wrong place to look. To discover what has been witnessed, we need simply to ask the laity or others who are presumably those being witnessed unto. What message are they receiving? And what is it saying to them? As a first step in answering those questions, I offer an observation from my own experience.

My work as a church consultant places me in direct contact with many laypeople and diocesan clergy. They speak openly about their experiences, good and bad, with men and women religious. The simple fact is that I have never heard a single person say anything remotely like "It's a real gospel witness to me that this body of religious men or women live under the same roof." I have often heard them say things

like "The Passionists really know how to stand with you when you are suffering or sorrowing," or "You Augustinians are genuinely welcoming," or "You Marianists really care for one another," or "I don't ever hear any of your sisters bad-mouth one of your community; you take pride in what your sisters do in ministering in the church." What they report as witnessing, in other words, is how religious relate to one another or to their religious body as a group. The fact that they do this relating under a single roof is simply not mentioned. And I have never heard any religious tell me that they have heard an observer mention the fact of single-roof residency as being of any witness value in itself. But you can be sure it will be trumpeted in every chapter discussion on community living.

OTHERS DO THAT

If we move beyond the observable fact—that outsiders do not refer to residential living as witness—to ask ourselves what might account for the fact that it is not mentioned (in spite of the belief among religious that they are witnessing by the fact of common residency), one hypothesis comes immediately to mind: Residing with other persons under a single roof has, in itself, no distinct witness value, because just about everybody outside religious life does that themselves. Extended families, until quite recently, lived under a single roof. Even today, if adult children move away from the family home, they usually wind up living with other people under a single roof. They prepare and eat meals more or less together. They care for the upkeep of their common dwelling. They bed down and get up each day, perhaps at different hours, therefore having to respect other persons' clocks. They negotiate, more or less formally and more or less successfully, the schedule of the group, the temperature in the house, the kinds of chores to be carried out by various members, and whether the body will allow a pet in the house. Often enough they pray, both individually and as a collective unit. And frequently they do so under conditions that many, if not most, religious would find unbearable, and in quarters much more cramped, to boot.

I do not note these things in order to evoke guilt in religious who share the same roof. There can be

many good reasons for the kind of space, privacy, common appliances, and even domestic help that some such religious enjoy, the needs of mission and apostolate being uppermost. The point is that living under the same roof with others is the common lot of most people; in and of itself, it has no significance as witness.

THEN WHAT IS WITNESS?

Laity and diocesan clergy will, nonetheless, frequently pay tribute to the witness of the life of vowed religious. What are they really talking about? As noted earlier, they are referring to the outstanding manner in which religious present themselves: the way they relate to one another, the way they exemplify some special characteristic of their particular order or congregation: peace, hospitality, reconciliation, contemplation, simplicity of life. The point is not that religious do this under a single roof but that they live out some dimension of the calling that is incumbent on all the baptized to a unique and recognizable degree. (Do we still need to be reminded, at this late date, of Vatican II's declaration that religious vows are only a modality of the call of all the baptized to practice the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity, and obedience?)

A final irony emerges from these reflections. If the way religious actually live and relate to one another is the only reality that can be received by outsiders as witness, two things seem to follow: the requirements are the same whether the religious live under a single roof or under separate roofs; and the witness can't happen if outsiders, as a result of the religious' need for privacy, are shut out from ever experiencing the reality in action. It would seem a bit bizarre for religious to be saying to one another, "We sure witness to the laity by the way we live in communities—but let's make sure they don't get in to see it."



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The Homosexuality Debate

Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.

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The past twenty years have been a time of unprecedented debate on the political, legislative, and theological issues involving sexual orientation, particularly homosexuality. This debate began in professional forums and quickly moved to theological forums. The recent publication of *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate* by Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse has opened this debate beyond moral theology and judicial circles to ministry personnel and inquiring churchgoers.

The context surrounding this debate is much larger than the issues themselves. A understanding of that context is useful in critically examining the debated issues. This article provides a brief sketch of that context—ideology, science, and compassion—and then summarizes the main points in the book by Jones and Yarhouse.

IDEOLOGY

Ideology is a systematic ordering of ideas, opinions, doctrines, and symbols that form a coherent philosophical outlook or perspective concerning how individuals, groups, and society should act. In contrast, science is a systematic ordering of data and knowledge that forms a coherent and reliable explanation

of phenomena based on observation, experimentation, and rationality. At best, science is the polar opposite of ideology. At worst, science and ideology are hopelessly intertwined. The reality is that some overlap between science and ideology occurs, commonly with regard to considerations such as determinism.

Determinism is the view that individuals have no free will because their choices and actions are caused. Needless to say, determinism is central in the ongoing debate about sexual orientation, primarily as an underlying assumption rather than a main topic of discussion.

There are three views of determinism: hard, soft, and indeterminate. Those who espouse hard determinism contend that responsibility for one's actions is an illusion, whereas those who espouse soft determinism believe that causation is not a compulsion and to act freely is not to act unpredictably. Those who espouse indeterminism believe that the self can influence causation. Today, the hard and soft determinists' view dominate debates involving sexual orientation.

For example, advocates of either the "nature" or "nurture" stance inevitably adopt a hard determinist position. They claim that sexual orientation is caused entirely by biology or entirely by parenting and early

life experiences. David McWhirter, M.D., a gay-rights advocate and highly respected psychiatrist-researcher, notes that there are relatively few hard determinists in the scientific community who believe that sexual orientation is totally biologically determined. Among those hard determinists are Blanchard and Zucker (*American Journal of Psychiatry*, 1994), who reanalyzed data from a 1981 study on sibling sex ratio and birth order and concluded that birth order is the single most reliable demographic difference between homosexual and heterosexual men.

The soft determinist position, on the other hand, would hold that the origins of behavior, including sexual orientation, are multiply determined and involve some measure of choice or decision. A basic premise of many contemporary approaches to psychotherapy and behavior is soft determinism. Accordingly, a soft deterministic view of sexual orientation is that it is a function of nature, or heredity; nurture, or environment; and choice, or decision.

For many, the sexual orientation debate is basically a matter of genetics versus choice. This distinction is itself a manifestation of hard determinism. It is probably more correct to say that while individuals have certain inclinations to homosexuality, bisexuality, or heterosexuality, the inclination is not a choice, but the individual has a choice to make about what to do with the inclination.

While from a scientific perspective the origins of sexual orientation are still unclear, from an ideological perspective there is little doubt. The psychotherapeutic and behavior-change implications of ideology are clearly demonstrated. Gay-affirmation therapy is espoused by gay-rights advocates. On the other hand, "reparative therapy" is advocated by the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality. Advocates of this ideology contend that individuals who have tried to accept a gay identity but have been dissatisfied or distressed should be allowed the opportunity to receive psychotherapy to relieve their gender identity conflict. These two distinctly different ideologies inform two very different psychotherapeutic treatment approaches.

SCIENCE

Underlying much of the debate on sexual orientation is the nature versus nurture question: Are homosexuality and bisexuality the result of biology (i.e., hormones or genetics) or parenting? A common conclusion is, "Sexual orientation is not what one does but who one is." However, some advocates of gay rights who are well-respected scientists caution against reaching premature closure. McWhirter has reviewed the major hormone, gene, and brain tissue

studies and concluded that "the most striking feature about these bits of evidence is that they seem to highlight the idea that the roots of sexual orientation, whether heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual, are multiple and variable. As long as there are questions being asked, some scientists will be proposing ways to find answers. There are certainly no clear-cut answers from biology yet, and there are few determinists who believe or even think all of the answers are to be found there" (in *Biological Theories of Sexual Orientation*, ed. by Oldhan et al., 1993). Today, nearly ten years later, current research continues to suggest that sexual orientation is not innate or biologically determined but rather is multiply determined.

Constructionism. Besides determinism, the social construction of reality commonly complicates the enterprise of science. Social construction is a process in which an individual or group revises or constructs a new or different interpretation or meaning that provides a better or more acceptable explanation for a phenomenon. Constructionism is often confused with scientific investigation. For example, in some published interviews and commentaries about pedophilia cases involving priests, pedophilia is described by some as a psychiatric disorder rather than a criminal behavior, or as immoral behavior. Those who construct pedophilia as primarily or only a sinful or immoral behavior reportedly view confession as a reasonable corrective. The implication is that if it is a psychiatric disorder, the alleged perpetrator's actions are considered to be more sick than criminal. This presumably explains the common practice of making financial settlements to victims rather than pursuing criminal prosecution. Interestingly, our society only recently constructed pedophilia as a psychiatric diagnosis, via the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III). Prior to that, pedophilia was considered to be a criminal or immoral behavior. Similarly, alcoholism, which had previously been viewed by many as a moral failing, was ascribed to a medical cause and thus could be diagnosed as a psychiatric disorder. With regard to constructionism and sexual orientation, it can be noted that the term "sexual preference" has been largely replaced with the more neutral term "sexual orientation" because of the implication that preference meant personal choice.

Whether it is scientifically justified for pedophilia to be considered only, or primarily, a psychiatric disorder is a consideration that has raised little discussion in the scientific and religious communities. Thus, it should not be too surprising that few understand or construct pedophilia as both a criminal

behavior and a psychiatric diagnosis. Surprisingly, few seem to view it as all three: criminal, psychiatric, and immoral behavior.

COMPASSION

For me, compassion takes precedence over ideology in debates regarding sexual orientation as well as in everyday dealings with individuals, irrespective of their sexual orientation. This means that sexual orientation issues are best discussed in an atmosphere of respect, integrity, and fairness. This presumably would hold for those endeavoring to work therapeutically with individuals with sexual orientation issues. In other words, it seems that advocating a specific ideology-based treatment for all clients or patients is the antithesis of compassion and competence and may also reflect a hard determinist viewpoint about the etiology of sexual orientation.

SCIENCE AND IDEOLOGY

I have opposed and continue to oppose the ordination of active homosexuals. Not surprisingly, scientific research studies are often cited in current debates about the morality of homosexual behavior. It is the improper use or misuse of science in these debates that has concerned Stanton Jones and Mark Yarhouse and prompted them to write *Homosexuality: The Use of Scientific Research in the Church's Moral Debate*. They intimate that both liberal and conservative Christians have a limited understanding of the scientific research on homosexuality and all too often make inaccurate assertions (e.g., that science confirms that homosexuality is a genetic condition) or illogical conclusions (e.g., that since it is impossible to reverse sexual orientation, being gay is a normal lifestyle variant) when drawing on the authority of science. Thus, they wrote this book to review the scientific literature critically and "explore the logic of how it might or might not be relevant to the ethical debate among Christians." A basic question that inevitably arises in such a discussion is: Who determines, and by what authority, what is and what is not a misuse of science and psychology?

The authors make no effort to conceal their assumptions and presuppositions in defending their biblically based, traditional Christian sexual ethic. "We will show persuasively, we hope, that while science provides us with many interesting and useful perspectives on sexual orientation and behavior, the best science of this day fails to persuade the thoughtful Christian to change his or her moral stance. Science has nothing to offer that would even remotely constitute persuasive evidence that would compel us

to deviate from the historic Christian judgment that full homosexual intimacy, homosexual behavior, is immoral." As regards their scholarly stance, the authors consider their book to "be a case study in good scholarship conducted 'through the eyes of faith.'"

The authors note that advocates have turned to "scientific" evidence in order to convince church leaders that traditional Christian moral beliefs and judgments regarding homosexual practices must be wrong, since these beliefs and judgments cannot be supported scientifically. The book is structured around the four topics that are at the center of the debate: prevalence, etiology, mental disorder, and changing orientation. Each of these topics is the focus of a core chapter in the book, and each critically reviews the scientific literature and "explores the logic of how it might or might not be relevant to the ethical debate among Christians."

The Prevalence of Homosexuality. With regard to the claim that homosexuality is very common today (with a prevalence rate of 10 percent or more of the general population), the authors cite studies suggesting that an actual prevalence rate of 2 to 3 percent is more accurate. They discount arguments that the prevalence is really 10 percent when exclusive homosexual orientation (i.e., attraction only to same-sex individuals [2 to 3 percent]) is combined with predominant homosexual orientation (i.e., attraction, for the most part, to same-sex individuals [presumably 7 to 8 percent]). The authors present data from 11 national probability survey studies that do not appear to support this assertion, which in the authors' opinion is "based on a misinterpretation of deeply flawed research published by Kinsey."

They contend that arguments that homosexuality is common and therefore morally neutral, or that homosexuality is immoral because it is rare, are both specious because they frame the debate—based on scientific research findings—in a way that makes the caricature of the traditional Christian moral position seem untenable. Whatever the prevalence rates, the authors insist that complicated moral questions can never be resolved with the citation of scientific data.

The Etiology of Homosexuality. Regarding the etiology of homosexuality, the authors review several psychological and environmental theories, as well as biological theories—particularly the adult hormonal hypothesis, the prenatal hormonal hypothesis, and the genetic hypothesis. They chronicle various scientific efforts to estimate the genetic influence or heritability of homosexuality via the so-called "gay gene" and conclude that the best recent

study of biologic etiology (Bailey, Dunne, and Martin, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2000) suggests that genetics may not be a significant causal factor. The authors conclude, after a critical analysis of the research on etiology, that the research is currently incomplete and thus inconclusive. Nevertheless, they concede that there is some evidence for psychological, environmental, family, and genetic influences, as well as brain differences, in the causation of homosexuality. Along with others in the scientific community, they support an interactionist hypothesis (i.e., that some combination of nature and nurture appear to be operative in explaining sexual orientation). However, they contend that while these factors may be contributing causes for a specific case of homosexuality, it cannot be concluded that one or more of these factors represent the etiology of homosexuality.

The authors take particular exception to the claim that if research persuasively demonstrates that homosexuality is caused by factors beyond an individual's control—meaning that because of causative factors, an individual is incapable of responsible choice—then it is wrong for the church to condemn homosexual activity or the gay lifestyle. Even if, they assert, there is a predisposition for homosexual desires and actions that is outside the individual's control, "that does not constitute moral affirmation of acting on those desires. . . . At the broadest level all humans are heirs to a predisposition that we have not chosen and that propels us toward self-destruction and evil—our sinful nature. The plight of the homosexual who has desires and passions that he or she did not choose is in fact the common plight of humanity."

Homosexuality and the Question of Psychopathology. Bailey et al. next address the issue as to whether homosexuality is a mental disorder or a normal lifestyle variant. Acknowledging that professional mental health organizations, particularly the American Psychiatric Association, have declared homosexuality to be a normal lifestyle variant rather than a psychiatric disorder, the authors indicate that "the majority of psychiatrists in America . . . and around the world continue to see same-sex attraction as signaling a mental illness." They do conclude that even if it is conceived as a normal lifestyle variant, it is a misrepresentation to suggest that homosexuals experience no more distress than heterosexuals. The authors cite research on the higher rates of depression, substance abuse, and suicidality among some but not all homosexuals. Whether these increased levels of distress reflect maladjustment, social prejudice, or other factors has yet to be determined. Nevertheless, the authors suggest that there is clear

evidence that "relational instability and promiscuity among male homosexuals must figure as problematic for Christians."

Furthermore, they suggest that the issue of pathology versus normal lifestyle variant is irrelevant to the more basic moral debate. The reason is that psychopathology and immorality are different realities, and although they can overlap at times, mental disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder and psychosis, are not intrinsically sinful life patterns.

The Question of Changing Sexual Orientation. Finally, Bailey et al. addresses the matter of whether psychotherapy or other interventions can effectively change homosexual patterns. They summarily reject the so-called scientific conclusion offered by many that there are no effective therapeutic approaches to change gays into heterosexuals. Instead, they review research that demonstrates that focused therapy can effect a change "of modest size, approximating that for such vexing conditions as . . . pedophilia, alcoholism, and antisocial personality disorder. Initial change may occur for only a minority, and relapses among those who change at all may be frequent, but that is not the same as saying that none can change." They concede that a profound change in sexual orientation occurs only infrequently. Nevertheless, a change in sexual orientation is irrelevant to being a Christian. The basic issue, the authors insist, is not conversion to heterosexuality but conversion to chastity (i.e., not engaging in homosexual actions.)

COMPASSION AND THE DEBATE

Even though it appears that the authors' reporting of the scientific literature is reasonably accurate and representative of published findings, the fact that religious and moral questions may be informed by scientific data but seldom settled by it renders scientific discourse on such matters uncertain and perhaps moot. Earlier, a basic question was posed: Who determines, and by what authority, what is and what is not a misuse of science and psychology? The question is not directly addressed by the authors. In my opinion, this is unfortunate, since there appears to be a circularity in the authors' use of data to disparage others' claims based on the same or similar data—a circularity that conceivably diminishes, rather than supports, credibility.

While the authors contend that the current debate on homosexuality involves a misuse of science, it is probably more accurate to describe it as the worst of science, wherein science and ideology are hopelessly intertwined. When some common ground is reached

on the issues of determinism and the social construction of sexual orientation, it may be possible to untangle ideology from science. Only then will it be legitimate and useful to consider how scientific findings can be brought to bear on the topic of homosexuality. It is unlikely that such common ground can be reached outside an atmosphere of mutual respect and compassion. While these conditions may not be immediately forthcoming in the debate, it is imperative that they be held up as criteria in moving what is now a clearly ideological debate in the direction of a scientifically informed debate—and perhaps, one day, in the direction of a true dialogue.

RECOMMENDED READING

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Preparing for Retirement

Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.

Retirement is largely a twentieth-century phenomenon whose connotation has shifted from a sense of worthlessness and uselessness to a right or privilege earned by hard work over many years. Members of religious communities, however, have had little concept of retirement until fairly recently. In the past, only illness or very advanced age was considered a sufficient reason to stop working. Even when no longer able to engage in active, external ministry, elderly religious performed a number of less taxing tasks, often related to the inner workings of the community. Changes in community organization over the past thirty years have afforded many religious an opportunity to develop a lifestyle in which their ministry is not so tightly tied to the world of work. This, along with other community and societal changes, has led to the need to consider retirement an integral part of the life cycle of religious as well as laypeople.

Retirement is a highly complex adaptation process that requires us to confront changes in our physical well-being and social environments, which may be highly stressful. Our ability to employ various coping mechanisms may mean the difference between a successful, satisfying retirement or one that is a source of low self-esteem and lacking in gratification. This adaptation process is fostered by our exploring the

meaning of retirement in general and as it applies to our own situation. Our exploration ought to include an examination of the cognitive, motivational, and affective components that comprise our personal definition of retirement. The ideas and images of retirement, the identification of value systems that are brought into question, and our personal feelings about retirement have enormous influence on adaptation to this stage of life.

RETIREMENT A LONG PROCESS

Although retirement is often viewed as a specific moment in time, it is actually a process that begins before a person leaves the work force and continues well into the future. The initial phase of retirement is aptly named the remote phase, for it is the simple recognition that at some distant time in the future, one will retire. Quite often, retirement looks rosy and unreal from this perspective.

The near phase is the time close to retirement—perhaps five years prior to the actual or projected date of retirement. At this point, we become aware of the realities of the retirement role and, often enough, reject the perceived loss of status, fear the loss of freedom and income, and deny the reality of aging. People who are actively preparing for retire-

Our ability to employ various coping mechanisms may mean the difference between a successful, satisfying retirement or one that is a source of low self-esteem and lacking in gratification

ment might use this time as a transition or practice period—for example, by developing other hobbies or interests. Many persons, however, including religious, are more inclined to resort to denial or repression in an effort to avoid an accurate appraisal of their situation, which often involves some combination of loss, threat, and attack, accompanied by feelings of sadness, anxiety, and anger.

These feelings are generally provoked by thoughts such as “What will I do?” or “I’m a useless, worthless nobody.” While such thoughts and feelings are a normal part of the preretirement process, they need to be dealt with in a positive manner. Seeking social support, for example, reduces the sense of isolation. Devising alternate ways to satisfy the needs these thoughts highlight, such as the need to belong or to be productive, serves to allay anxiety. Recognizing the cognitive distortions that are called into play in making such statements and replacing them with more accurate, positive thoughts allows us to pass through this stage experiencing some sadness without sinking into depression.

While denial of such thoughts and feelings may be detrimental, it is equally harmful to project these thoughts onto others or to express them in various forms of self-destructive behavior, such as excessive drinking, drug abuse, self-imposed social isolation, or suicide. Opening ourselves to the experience of such feelings as they arise encourages us to accomplish the necessary grief work of this time of life. Retirement

marks the ending of a major phase in our lives, and it deserves to be acknowledged as such. We are required to let go of certain cherished roles, with their responsibilities and their “perks,” and the power and status they afforded us are difficult, if not impossible, to replace.

Once retirement is finalized, we tend to experience a honeymoon phase that allows us to adjust to the newly acquired freedom of time and space. Religious often are offered a sabbatical or an opportunity to make an extended retreat or a pilgrimage as a way of easing the transition into this new phase of life. This honeymoon period is then followed by a phase of re-orientation and stability, which involves acceptance of ourselves as retired and the establishment of a routine, satisfying life. For many religious, this means engaging in a new, albeit less taxing, type of ministry—the counterpart to the “second career” phenomenon among other retirees. Given reasonably good health and longevity, this phase may last for quite some time.

The later phases, those of disenchantment and termination, occur as we begin to cope with the inevitable losses of later life. These losses include failing health, physical or mental disability, loss of friends and family members, and, eventually, terminal illness.

THEORIES ON RETIREMENT

Over the years, a number of different theories concerned with the understanding of retirement have been advanced. If we take retirement as a fluid process that actually encompasses a fairly substantial number of years, these theories do have a place at different points along the way.

Crisis theory, for example, offers useful insights for understanding the adjustment problems we are likely to experience as the actual date of retirement draws near, and during the first few months following retirement. It is a helpful theory because it does not imply that the difficulties we experience adapting to this developmental milestone are pathological. Instead, they are considered part of the normal life crises we encounter at various turning points in our lives. While initially there may be a period of turmoil, eventually we achieve a refocusing and remobilization of energy and activity. Just as any transitional period contains a loss of some sort or a radical change in our relation to our selves, so does retirement. Resolution of feelings of loss is a part of the process of meeting the crisis and moving on to experience life in a new dimension. We would do well to remember that with the resolution of loss comes a sense of new beginning, the first day of the rest of our lives. How

we experience this new beginning is highly individual, but I would suggest that we might find ourselves enjoying a higher level of self-direction, insight, self-acceptance, and wisdom.

Insights drawn from role theories may also prove helpful. Our work or ministerial role is one of the most important roles we assume, for it is a major anchoring point of our identity. Its loss may threaten our sense of self and generate feelings of disconnection, as we no longer have the opportunities for daily social contacts or group affiliations to which we have been accustomed. Role exits are not limited to the time of retirement but occur at various points throughout our lives—for example, when we leave adolescence and enter adulthood. When such role exits approach, we need the ability and the readiness to relinquish the roles we have already mastered and to learn new roles that have the potential to be more complex, more demanding, and more rewarding.

In the past, role exits in later life differed, as they were not usually followed by participation in new roles that were perceived as desirable. At this point, however, the view of role exits at the time of retirement appears to be changing as more of us reach retirement earlier, in better health, and with the expectation of a longer life. Even more important, many people retiring today bring with them the attitude that life is far from over and envision new ground to conquer. Influenced by the impending retirement of the Baby Boomers, a new paradigm of the retirement phase of life is in the making.

One such paradigm is that of the “Ulysses People,” a phrase coined by John A. B. McLeish. The Ulysses People are those who maintain a sense of quest in their lives and are committed to maintaining their powers to learn, produce, and create until the end of their life journeys. Their goal-directed quest for new knowledge and opportunities far surpasses any such goal-directed behavior observed in the past, even by persons considered to be self-actualizing.

One valid criticism of role theory points out that the work role may not be the dominant role in a person’s life. Nonetheless, for many religious, the work of the active ministry was the focus of much of their energy, as it was an integral part of a larger call to service, to exercising a preferential option for the poor, and to the embodiment of gospel values. Still, as retirement draws near, it may be helpful to consider other roles held over the course of a lifetime that might now be deepened, as time and energy once spent in active ministry may be redirected. Such roles may involve our membership in our families, in our local religious community, or in the larger religious community. We have ties of friendship, citizenship

roles, and our membership in the local parish or diocese. All these roles remain operational, and new roles may be added, but we must permit ourselves to think “outside the box” in order to discover them.

ALWAYS SEEKING

Nearly every religious community dedicated to active ministry also has a contemplative element as part of its charism. Often, however, the demands of the active ministry are dominant, and time devoted to prayer is quite limited. As we enter into the stage of retirement, however, we are offered the gift of time to deepen our life of prayer. We who have been devoted Marthas, busy about many things, are now invited to sit at Lady Wisdom’s banquet to receive from her fullness. As wisdom was identified as the crowning virtue of this last stage of life, we might consider ourselves to be “*Sophia People*” and adopt as our motto *Semper querens* (“always seeking”). Our seeking at this time in life need not be limited to the realm of external knowledge or material acquisition; it can turn us to the work of the inner journey, the work of the heart.

Both activity and continuity theories have a good deal to offer those who are in the early stages of retirement, are in good health, and have adequate resources to maintain their earlier lifestyle patterns. Both of these theories suggest that people adjust best to retirement when they maintain high levels of activity and continue levels of involvement similar to those they experienced in middle age. An optimal level of continuity enables us to live in familiar surroundings and to interact with people known to us while benefiting from continued productive activity and engagement in an active social life. Certainly, these theories would suggest that people are happiest when aging in place rather than being obliged to move to the community’s retirement house.

There is a negative feature to these theories, however, as some people would prefer not to be quite so “busy” as they once were, and the emphasis placed on activity may lead to a sense of worthlessness, guilt, or failure. Each person ought to set his or her own standard for activity, and individual differences must be respected. Some communities have addressed this issue by introducing the concept of different levels of ministry. As a person ages, he or she might move from level 1 (full activity) to level 2 and level 3 over the course of retirement. Another negative feature of these theories is that they tend to ignore the fact that change does occur, that normal developmental transitions do have an impact on one’s lifestyle, and that sometimes people are not able to continue their former lifestyle because of medical or other reasons.

Anxiety, depression, and substance abuse are among the most prominent mental health problems encountered during retirement age

A middle road, respectful of individual differences as well as community resources, is needed. In this regard, it is also the obligation of retirees to take stock of their ability to continue to function within the particular community in which they have been living. Too often, there seems to be a sense of entitlement, a demand that other members of the community provide a level of care that would be more appropriate in an assisted living setting or even, at times, a nursing home.

Much of our negative stereotyping of retirement seems to stem from a misapplication of disengagement theory. This theory suggests that elders inevitably withdraw from the various roles they occupied in midlife and sharply and quickly reduce their level of activity or sense of involvement in life. Critics of this theory point out that nothing makes such a level of disengagement either natural or inevitable. Disengagement is often related to a lack of opportunity for continued participation in social activities and is frequently associated with disabling illness. If carried to its logical conclusion, disengagement theory would justify the neglect of elders by the community or by society, as they no longer perform any useful function.

From midlife on, we are inclined to turn our attention inward. This is not, however, the sort of disengagement this theory would imply. Instead, it is an age-appropriate exploration of our inner landscape, which might include the use of life review or journaling, a coming to a deeper level of self-acceptance and self-understanding—the dawning of what Erik Erikson called the stage of integrity. Thinking of this

theory in terms of persons who have made a lifelong commitment to religious life, it is also an expression of a deeper prayer life—raising the ladder of contemplation, turning more directly to God—rather than an abandonment of life.

Engagement/disengagement is not an either/or situation. It is a process marked by decision points, along a continuum, as to how much of himself or herself an individual wishes to invest in a given project at a specific time. Eventually, if we live long enough, there will come a time when we must reevaluate our physical abilities and establish new standards of excellence more appropriate to our age and physical condition. To continue to demand that we be able to function as we did during our younger years is to court disaster. Our self-esteem will suffer a major blow because at some point we will not be able to continue with our activities in the manner to which we are accustomed. It is important that we be able to revalue ourselves in a realistic manner. For some of us, the disabling effects of age and illness may show up sooner, but for all of us, at some point, they come. One of the developmental tasks of this stage of life requires that we set standards for ourselves that are in harmony with our new state in life.

PREPARATION FOR RETIREMENT

Certain themes and issues need to be addressed as a part of a serious preparation for retirement. The timing and voluntariness of retirement is a major issue for many people. It is far preferable if retirement is seen as a choice rather than something forced upon oneself. Within the parameters of a specific ministry situation, exploring the possibility of moving from full-time to part-time work as a way of preparing for eventual retirement may be helpful, especially because many religious do not retire until about age seventy. These days, financial issues must also be considered. This aspect seems to be more problematic for women's communities, as it is for women in other walks of life.

Health is a major issue that often affects the time of retirement and the degree of satisfaction experienced in retirement. Should health issues dictate an early retirement from active ministry, it may be helpful to consider joining or forming a support group for persons with similar problems. Reducing the social isolation that often accompanies forced retirements and physical suffering may be beneficial and offers new avenues for ministry. Anxiety, depression, and substance abuse are among the most prominent mental health problems encountered at this time in life. While there are many losses to experience and adjustments to make, neither depression nor anxiety

ought to be accepted as normal for this life stage. Pre-retirement and retirement counseling may be helpful in preventing the development of these diseases. Psychotherapy, and in some instances medication, may serve to address underlying problems and reduce the temptation to self-medicate through abuse of alcohol or other mind- or mood-altering substances.

The greater freedom and flexibility associated with retirement offers us greater autonomy in setting our schedules, allowing for a less stressful, more relaxed pace of life. On the other hand, some persons, feeling lost and insecure, may feel threatened by the lack of structure. This appears to be more a problem if the retiree continues to live in the same setting and must watch others assume ministerial roles he or she once filled. Nevertheless, retirement does offer us an opportunity to be creative in choosing our activities. New areas of ministry may also be available, thus fulfilling our need to be productive. One retired sister with whom I am acquainted spends time each day holding and feeding babies who have been severely neglected. Others have taken up roles as parish visitors, while still others use their teaching skills in literacy programs for children and adults.

One common theme found throughout the retirement literature deals with the importance of strong social supports. Here is one way in which members of religious communities reap the hundredfold. Unlike many people who have maintained few friendships outside the scope of their work, religious have the advantage of having a social network, on the local and regional levels, that spans the bulk of their lifetime. Many religious enhance this advantage by choosing to retire in parts of the country where they have strong ties to family or friends.

In the end, however, retirement, like any other phase of life, is what we make it. Although there are difficulties we each must face, we do have the power within us to forge our identities anew, to make choices regarding our use of time, to select those activities or retirement ministries which suit us, and to choose our response to physical suffering and limitation.

DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS

Preparation for retirement may be enhanced further by considering the developmental tasks appropriate to this stage of life. As with any major transition, identity issues reappear as we exit from one role to take up another. At the retirement stage of life, we are being called upon to birth our mature selves or, as Carl Jung might say, to birth our true self. While some would think that retirement spells "the end," this is really far from the case. Instead, we are

asked to become cocreators of our truest selves, to have the courage to be—for as we witness the shortening of our days and experience periods of cold and darkness, there is still potential for new life within. As T. S. Eliot reminded us in "Little Gidding," "to make an end is to make a beginning." How to achieve this new identity?

One of the initial steps involves our willingness to identify and mourn our losses, which may include loss of ministry, health, friends, or prestige. We are aided in this work if we are able to develop a level of emotional flexibility that allows us to grieve and to move on. Emotional flexibility enhances our adaptation to new social or ministerial roles that are age-appropriate. Flexibility in establishing our standards and values is also a helpful personality asset to develop. It assists us by focusing our attention on things we can do rather than on deficits that erode our self-esteem. Such flexibility permits us to surrender the ideals of action and achievement that were appropriate to our younger years and to set standards and values in harmony with our new state in life. Flexibility of this sort enables us to bypass a sense of shame related to loss of physical power by encouraging us to value the wisdom we have gleaned from the experiences of our lifetime.

Another of the major tasks of this life stage involves a reworking of our dependency needs. On the one hand, we need to guard against pseudo independence, which serves only to generate anxiety in others as they watch our refusal to face our genuine physical or mental limitations. We also need to avoid the opposite extreme of excessive dependence. Retirement ought not to be an excuse for failing to function at appropriate levels or for manipulating others into caring for us. Erikson defined one developmental task of this stage of life as encouraging others to demonstrate an appropriate level of care toward us and to do so in such a way that the very act of accepting care is in itself an act of caring. Caring behavior does not denote a one-sided dependency. Instead, it is a complex interchange that defines an enduring relationship between persons. Accepting care and resources from another does not transform the recipient into a needy, passive burden. Attachments between people do not necessarily create pathological dependency. Just as we may lose a physical function at any age, so also may we gain a companion and friend. As we prepare to enter the retirement phase of life, let us ask ourselves whom we allow to grace us with the gift of caring.

Erik and Joan Erikson continued their research until they, and many of their subjects, were well into their eighties. As a result, they identified an additional life stage occurring later in life, which they

termed grand-generativity. The developmental tasks that accompanied this stage of life involved an expansion of the virtue of caring, moving out beyond the claims of our immediate circles of family and friends to embrace all generations of children yet unborn. In many ways, these tasks contain elements of celibate love, extending far beyond traditional boundaries to include others.

Our reworking of identity issues may also be fostered by developing the virtue of caring during this stage of grand-generativity. Adopting a compassionate attitude toward the world at large, countering the greed that is destroying the air, water, earth, and even our own lives, we grow into an ecological sense of self. Some religious might feel called to become more active in addressing environmental concerns that pertain to their own local area or are of national or international concern. The church at large would also benefit from the influence of members who have a well-developed ecological sense of self, as there is a need for deeper understanding of the role we play in the ongoing work of creation.

Psychologist Robert Peck identified three additional developmental tasks that come into play at various points in the aging-retirement process. One of these, bodily transcendence, invites us to strive to live beyond the physical problems and reductions in bodily strength that are associated with the later stages of life. This living beyond asks not that we deny genuine physical problems but that we not reduce ourselves to them. Instead, we are asked to value the core of ourselves and to maintain interest in the world beyond the limits of physical pain.

A second task Peck suggested was that of ego differentiation, which is related to our need to rework identity issues. Recognizing that the ways in which we define ourselves also serve to limit us, we are invited to expand and transcend our current self-definition. We are more than the work we do, more than the specific ministry we may be preparing to leave behind. Attending to the task of ego differentiation affords the Creator archetype an opportunity to take an active role in our lives. It encourages us to develop a sense of vision for our lives through our willingness to explore alternatives and grow.

The third developmental task, that of ego transcendence, requires a long period of preparation before we are fully able to address it. This task requires that we consider and deal with the eventual loss of our individual egos and separate selves. The work involved in completing this life task often is experienced as a dark night, for it is very difficult for us to

let go of the selves we have so carefully constructed over the years. Sometimes this task is perceived as a diminishment of us as individuals, and we are tempted to fight and to cling to what we think of as *me, my, mine*. Perceived from another viewpoint, however, ego transcendence may be experienced as a release into a higher level of differentiation and integration. Ego differentiation may then become an invitation to open into a larger sense of identity, to become an integral part of the New Creation.

A last task of the retirement phase of life might be described as a hunger for and a turning to a deeper level of prayer. Having nurtured our spiritual selves and offered what guidance we could to those coming up behind us, we are now able to gift ourselves with time and quiet in which to put into perspective all that has occurred in our lives. Further developing our spiritual lives through deep prayer encourages within us a sense of peace and serenity. We are offered the opportunity to reconcile with those things we did not have the power to change while acknowledging the efforts we made to nourish growth in ourselves and in others. Deepening our prayer life fosters recognition of the rightness of the paths we have walked in company with Sophia, Lady Wisdom. It opens an opportunity to appreciate our inner beauty and the richness of our life experiences, as well as the abiding love that has supported us throughout our lives. Recalling that the seeking itself is wisdom, we may savor the fruit of integrity as we make our way home through the last miles of our life journey.

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A Message to Postmodern Leaders

Donna Markham O.P., Ph.D.

In the cultural upheaval and unsettling reality in which we find ourselves today, leaders bear a heavy burden of trying to instill hope and courage in those institutions and organizations they serve. Recent terrorism, war, unpredictability, and pervasive fear serve only to underscore the challenges of this period in our history. Leadership is, nonetheless, a sacred trust.

Let me begin this reflection by sharing an incident that I believe addresses that sacred trust as it is proclaimed throughout the gospel: that relationships heal; that compassion is conveyed wordlessly in our reverence toward one another; that God's spirit permeates every corner of our limited human existence, no matter how bleak or desperate it may seem; that there is, indeed, more life than death in every situation.

Two years ago, my colleagues and I began an outreach ministry to the Inuit people in a small community of about 1,000, situated in the Canadian northeastern high Arctic—seven hours due north of Toronto by plane, 340 miles north of the Arctic Circle. There is nothing but tundra snow as far as the eye can see. The Inuit have lived there for 4,000 years, sustaining their communities under some of the harshest conditions humans can tolerate. We travel in teams of two, four times each year, in order to provide desperately needed psychological help to this

settlement that is so far removed from our experience that most people there have never seen a tree or dug their hands into the earth.

On a recent visit, an elder—I will call her Elisapi—asked to speak to one of the clinicians. Because Elisapi spoke no English, a translator was present. This was her second consultation with that practitioner.

Elisapi's eyes filled with tears upon entering the counseling office. "I want to talk with you alone," she said to the psychologist. "No translator. I want to tell you my story in private." When the therapist indicated that, sadly, she had no knowledge of the Inuktitut language and would not be able to understand Elisapi without a translator, the elder responded, "I will come wherever you live, and we will find a translator there. I trust you. I just want to tell you about my life. I have made sins that I need to tell you in secret." The therapist told her that she lived very far away, it would be very expensive to travel there, and there would probably be no one who spoke her language there. The elder wept quietly. At that point, the therapist—realizing that it was far more important that Elisapi speak the truth about her life than for the therapist to understand it—said, "Perhaps you could draw some pictures about your life and come back alone—no translator—and you can tell me about what has happened to you." The elder

smiled broadly and set off to draw her life story. And so the story was told—not understood completely but received in reverence, caught in a shared reflection communicated through a deeply connected gaze.

Congregation leadership draws one into the sacred story of life. Living in the midst of these complex, fast-paced times, we, like Elisapi, have the need to entrust our story to another, to share the pain and the joy of our struggles to live deliberately in faith and communion with those around us. Those called to lead enter the humble and sacred space of being entrusted with the words of another's search for meaning, healing, acceptance, and care. Whether in the premodern environment of the high Arctic or in the frenetic postmodern world in which we find ourselves, there is a desperation to connect with another, to share our experience, to look into the face of the other and discover something sacred, to be forgiven, to be cared for. This is the bedrock of community building, the core of what I call spiritlinking.

Spiritlinking is the deliberate and untiring act of working through all that prevents us from entering into communal conversion and transformation. Spiritlinking happens as we build the circle of friends, foster networks of human compassion, interweave teams of relationship through which new ways of responding to the mission of Jesus take form and find expression.

CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

As we leave the high Arctic and consider the social context in which we find ourselves today, it is clear to me that we are called to link hearts and spirits in ways that are necessary for our very survival as people of the gospel—indeed, perhaps, as a human race. We are living in the intersecting moments of a pervasive cultural upheaval that is permeating our faith life as it permeates every aspect of our global reality. As the modern age draws to a close—an age that shaped the minds of all of us over the age of 30—and the postmodern era begins to unfold itself, we are witnessing the collapse of a way of conceptualizing reality. We find ourselves questioning what we have long held to be objectively true about ourselves and our culture.

While a full discourse on the philosophical underpinnings of postmodernism is far beyond the scope of most discussions, it is of critical importance that we familiarize ourselves and become conversant with what this upheaval means for those of us who dare to serve in roles of leadership these days. For us to remain incognizant is to place our future life in mission in jeopardy.

The modern era came into being with the dawn of

the industrial age. It was characterized by accelerating rates of change and planned growth. It relied on science and technology to attest to the truth of our reality and to bring about a better world; it trusted leaders to make decisions that would benefit the common good. More democratic forms of leadership began to develop as people moved away from agrarian paternalism. Western philosophers and historians acknowledge that the failure of the “modern project” was marked by two cataclysmic events: the Holocaust and Hiroshima. These disasters shook humankind to its core and resulted in a creeping mistrust of much of what we believed we could count on.

Postmodernism refers to the abandonment, the “deconstruction” if you will, of the modern project. The modern project was built upon the value of continuing industrial progress, the triumph of technology and science. That is to say, the undergirding of the modern age was based on the premise that there is an objective reality that can be known and measured; that there are certain universal truths that hold across our experience; that it is possible to prove scientifically what is real and true; that there is authority outside the self that can be relied upon.

Postmodernism is characterized by pervasive distrust of anyone outside the self; a cult of suspicion of external authority; cynicism about the possibility of any objective truths; institutional fragmentation; and rampant subjectivism, or individualism. The voice of postmodernism sounds something like, “My perception of reality is not yours, so no two of us can see things the same way. Truth is relative and subjective, and there is no way to prove anything absolutely. If we try to prove something, we alter it in the process. The only thing I can know for certain, and trust, is myself.”

It is not surprising that we find our young people, even ourselves, contending with this emergent reality as it gives rise to questioning the very foundations of our faith. Is there any such thing as an “authority” other than myself? Aren’t we all leaders in our own right? Why should I trust you? Can I really trust anyone? Who says it is important that the community’s good should supercede my personal gain? What is the meaning of faith or belief? What purpose does it serve? Can we pray together at all if my experience of the sacred is so unique that no one else can comprehend it? Such questions are having a marked impact on the way we relate with each other, the way we relate with and understand authority, and the way we organize our communities and our institutions, as well as our capacity to come together as a community of faith.

Whether we like it or not, whether we agree with it or not, we must contend with the disturbance such

Postmodern conditions have created an unprecedented crisis in mission across most of our trusted institutions

questions foment. We are part of a monumental global social context that is in the process of developing a very different way of interpreting contemporary reality. Perhaps influenced by information technology, perhaps reinterpreted because of insights gleaned from the new sciences, perhaps led by economic globalization (to name but a few from a long list of factors), we are thinking differently from our ancestors. We find that our personal lives are affected by this constructivist thinking, and that our organizational lives, including our experience of church and religious life, are significantly impacted by it. We feel a loss of balance. We often have a keen awareness of surges of grief over the loss of what once was. Nonetheless, I suspect that spending energy trying to counter the tide serves only to position us in some wrathful frame of mind and spirit that will ultimately serve to foment even greater fragmentation—and will probably prove futile in the end.

What is clear is that we cannot apply modern mindsets or attempt modern resolutions to the tumultuous upheaval through which we are living. In other words, it simply will not work to try to return to, or enforce, rationales or practices that made eminent sense yesterday. Those of us who have tried to do this have learned the painful lessons inherent in such attempts.

I would invite you to think about situations, in your own leadership experience, in which you have become deeply aware that the solutions of yesterday are no longer adequate responses to the problems we face today. For example, an issue of serious concern to most of us is how we will live our community life today. As increasing numbers of us find ourselves to be the sole community member in a particular

ministerial setting, this question looms all the larger. How will we not mirror the individualism of our culture? How will we promote the development of community in a world that is taunted by separatism?

Yesterday's solution might have sounded something like this: "Religious life has traditionally been defined by the common life; therefore, to be truthful to the essence of the life, all religious should live together in conventional housing of some sort." But that rationale simply does not compel action for us today. Leaders could resort to ordering religious under obedience to comply, but the toll that action would take on morale would be horrific, and the mission would likely suffer as persons contended with deepening suspicion about authority. Alternatively, a rationale for today might sound something like this: "The global ecological crisis threatens the lives of the poor as we North Americans and Western Europeans become more comfortable; are we prepared, at not an insignificant level of sacrifice, to take radical action to share resources in common so that others might have a chance for life?" Examination of the reality and the conversations of the heart that follow serve as strong motivation to take uncomfortable actions for the sake of the common good.

All this is to say that the modern world's responses to our contemporary dilemmas are no longer sufficiently compelling to move us forward today. Nonetheless, the pull to apply yesterday's solutions is strong and tantalizing, and we find ourselves all too frequently resorting to modern responses to a postmodern reality. As my computer regularly reminds me, however, it truly is a "fatal error" to engage in such uncreative responses to the critical issues that face us now.

What, then, might leaders do in order to ensure that our ministerial endeavors will perdure in our contemporary atmosphere of skepticism and redefinition? What must we do to keep alive our ministry to the brokenhearted and dispirited, who long to find hope in the midst of these confusing times?

TASK OF RECONSTRUCTION

When faced with such pervasive societal fragmentation, unpredictability, and instability, a serious question we must ask ourselves is, *Can the center hold?* This is the critical *identity in mission* question. That is, are we clear enough about who we are, committed enough to what we are about, that each member of the community of faith feels a deep sense of purpose and meaning in belonging?

Postmodern conditions have created an unprecedented crisis in mission across most of our trusted institutions. We were unprepared for the disturbing

impact this would have on our sponsored entities, on the church, on the practice of religion, on religious life, on the “hard” sciences as well as on the behavioral sciences—indeed, on empirical thought itself. It seemed that the “center”—identified by our core values—was truly in danger of blowing apart. We are learning, perhaps later than we might have wished, that the center will hold only if our identity in mission is clear. We can contend with the disturbance of postmodern queries when we are able to answer this: Who are we, and for what do we put our lives on the line?

There is a serious caveat in all of this, however. The response to that question comes not from a posture of force but rather from a disposition of reverent conversation and relationship. It issues from our shared faith and contemplative engagement with the Sacred.

It is quite clear to most of us today that simply issuing an executive directive delineating who we are and what we are about, or definitively stating, once and for all, who belongs and who needs to be routed out of our communities or our institutions, will not resolve our dilemmas about identity in mission. We know all too well how coercive or threatening decrees serve to alienate today rather than to unite. The core purpose and meaning of our congregations will not hold today simply because we declare it to be so. Nor will going through exercises designed to arrive at mission statements or redesign governance structures be sufficient to hold the center. The task of reconstruction demands far more—and frankly, some of what will be demanded of us is yet terribly unclear. But, trusting that somehow we will be among the architects of new modes of reconstructive leadership, let me dare to make a few comments.

Common wisdom across the disciplines purports that the elements that will propel us with energy and meaning into postmodernity are *community, spirituality, action on behalf of the good that we hold in common*, and an attitude characterized by *hopefulness, compassion, and reconciliation*. As members of the community of believers, as religious, we ought to know something about this! I believe that we as church have much to offer our world at this moment if we can take seriously our need to arrive at new ways of addressing the crises that face us.

The task of reconstruction is grounded in the gospel. That is, we ground our response to our culture in *relationship*—to God, to one another—unreservedly promoting connection, collaboration, and conversation across all that threatens to divide us or separate us from one another. Candid conversation binds people together as the community organizes itself for mission. Without collaboration that bids us to

respond in concert to the critical needs of the mission, without collaboration that is unreservedly dependent upon the best thinking of a group of committed persons, we risk emulating either the autocratic modes of a past era or the separatist heresies that reside in the more negative recesses of postmodernism. We are called to forge new ways of working together—ways that are grounded in connection with one another as we strive to connect ever more deeply with Jesus. Gospel-driven community emphasizes relationships between and among all people. It is built upon communication, conversation, and spirited interchange.

Relationship in community is deepened as we dare to share faith with one another. We cannot pray together if we cannot talk together. The spiritlinking leader takes hold of the privilege of inviting persons to reveal the unfolding work of God throughout their lives. The openness, the willingness to receive the story and to enter the holy space of the soul attest to the truth that no one is abandoned, no one stands alone, no one is simply a lone monad in the midst of this frenzied world that seems to canonize individualism and autonomy. As together we break open the word of God, and break open the words of a human life, we connect with one another in ways that decry the heretical components of a culture that regards the other with a certain calculated and distanced suspicion.

DECONSTRUCTION OF AUTHORITY

The deconstruction of authority has been a strong consequence of the onset of postmodernism. Realizing that autocratic models of the exercise of authority, even as they were tempered by more democratic efforts, resulted in the failure of the modern project, all exercise of authority has come under scrutiny, if not outright suspicion. Clearly not comfortable with the wanton discard of authority, we struggle with trying to develop new modes of exercising leadership and authority that free communal energy for the service of the mission. Many of us have struggled with what the exercise of authority means today, as it is under fire in most sectors of our society.

Many organizational studies over the years have supported our anecdotal awareness that top-down, directive authority is not effective in community building. It redounds negatively on morale, is held suspect by coworkers, and often results in frozen rage. Such harbored resentment impairs effectiveness in service of the mission.

At the same time, we are aware that the exercise of authority entails far more than facilitation. While we have a sense that developing smaller, internetworked

Leaders whose personal need to be liked supercedes their commitment to community building will not be able to navigate the postmodern terrain—nor will leaders who remain entrenched in rigidly learned response styles

and fluid styles of leading, and becoming more comfortable with collaborative and less direct exertion of control, are part of the emerging picture, the redefinition of authority in the church is obviously a “work in progress.” We need to try many things and evaluate them well, as these modes move us toward or away from community, shared spirituality, and reconciliation. Our new learning curve could mistakenly be held suspect by some as a devaluation of authority. But a more collaborative and less prominent exertion of directive authority does not devalue authority; rather, it calls us to examine different modes of leadership that may be more effective in the formation of communities of faith.

Postmodern pastoral leaders exercise authority in the anticipation of and the flexible management of rogue events—those unpredictable occurrences that have an unexpected, often profound outcome on the community’s capacity to realize its mission. The ease in managing such occurrences is a good indicator of effective leadership today. While leaders often cannot foresee the rogue event, the spiritlinking leader is

at ease in working with the surprises that unfold as a result of it. Let me offer two examples demonstrative of such unpredicted events.

In the state of Michigan in the mid-1970s, the Parochial Aid Proposal was defeated. This resulted in the closure of a large number, if not most, of the Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Detroit. It also resulted in the loss of jobs for literally hundreds of women religious across the state. Community leaders were faced with an unanticipated event of huge proportions. What did they do? Religious leaders provided for the massive retooling of their members in religious education, pastoral care, and social services. Such leadership flexibility and response resulted in the state having an extraordinarily highly prepared cadre of lay and religious who were directly focused on the proclamation of the gospel in ways that had not previously been imagined. It also resulted in what came to be known by religious across the United States as “open placement”—a radically different way of determining apostolic assignments that had, in turn, a profound impact on shaping contemporary religious life.

A more mundane rogue event took place when I came to the Southdown Institute. One day, I queried if the staff enjoyed eating lunch in a large, monastic-style square of oblong tables, with clinicians sitting around the periphery. Each person seemed always to sit nearest to those staff members with whom he or she felt comfortable. The response to my query was that they really hadn’t thought about it. So we ordered a set of round tables that each seated five or six people. That small action did more to build staff cohesion and a sense of community than any workshop or process we might have undertaken.

You might ask yourselves what rogue events have been or currently are at play in your community setting. How did you, or could you, capitalize on those occurrences? How could your response make use of such events to sharpen focus on the mission and deepen the sense of community?

LEADERSHIP SKILLS NEEDED

As we stand on the emergent edge of postmodernity, in addition to considering how we will respond to rogue events, we must also determine what skills leaders need in order to undertake the process of gospel-focused reconstruction. Perhaps most significantly, leaders must be committed to contemplative reflection. We cannot simply lead from a skill base; we must lead from attentive listening to the spirit of God acting through us. Spiritlinking leadership demands of us an enormous generosity of heart that expands as it approaches unison with holy Wisdom.

Given such self-giving to the Sacred, we become willing to subordinate our own positions and desires to the needs of the community, to the good that we hold in common.

Reading, studying, and reflecting on our contemporary experience broadens our response base. Leaders must be able to respond in a variety of ways, according to the demands of the panoply of tasks confronting us today. One interventional style is insufficient to cover all situations. For example, there are times when, in order to reinforce the cohesion of the community, the leader brings differing perspectives to the surface and manages conflict. At other times, when the community is threatened by fragmentation or by destructive subgrouping or divisiveness, truth telling and consensus building are called for. And sometimes, in response to critically time-bound situations, it is imperative that crisis intervention strategies rule. Flexibility and the astute assessment of the community at any given moment are the marks of an effective leader who is always in a posture of learning.

On the other hand, leaders whose personal need to be liked supercedes their commitment to community building in the service of the mission will not be able to navigate the postmodern terrain—nor will leaders who remain entrenched in rigidly learned response styles. This is no time for “But we have always done it this way” or “The tradition has been to. . . .” Half the people who have ever lived on this planet are alive now; the rationale of history and tradition is not particularly compelling to the postmodern young.

Furthermore, leaders must be superb conversationalists, both able and eager to engage in dialogue in many different spheres of influence, encouraging discussions about differences, exploring conflicts, and nondefensively managing diverse viewpoints, all the while upholding the standard of the mission of Jesus. Moreover, leaders must be at ease knowing that they will not be able to—nor should they—control every outcome. Beyond predictability, postmodern organizations (including the church and our religious congregations) face rogue events at unprecedented rates. These events need to be incorporated, expanded, and worked with at each turn of the moment. As future directions take surprising form, the toleration of ambiguity must become part and parcel of the postmodern pastoral leader’s repertoire.

To serve in leadership in these times is both exciting and enormously challenging. You have placed your very lives at the service of the mission of Jesus. You are a precious gift to the church and to us all. Be attentive to caring for yourself in the midst of it all. Identify signs of personalized anger and burnout, and obtain consultation. The times are demanding and fraught with ambiguity. The toll on leaders can be significant—and even predictable. Keep probing the “meaning questions” as you call persons to ongoing faith sharing. Realizing that the key to the reconstructive challenge resides in relationship building and community formation, attend to all the ways in which you can promote conversations of the heart in the pastoral setting. Be careful not to fear conflict. It is a necessary part of any emergent transformative reality. Managed well, it becomes another means by which trust is deepened and new insights are gleaned.

Despite our personal attitudes toward it, we are the ones who are part of this emerging era. We experience the excitement of living in this hybrid time where many different organizational forms and dynamics coexist. While the time is chaotic and confusing, it is a time replete with the creative possibility of fashioning a more respectful future—one grounded in commitment, communion, conversation, and care. It is a time when we have much to offer our world if we would but dare to break new ground and take bold risks in the service of our discipleship.

It is a time when we attest to the sustained hope that even under harsh and seemingly inhospitable conditions, renewed life is emerging. Continue to risk in the service of the One who promises us over and over again that there is, indeed, more life than death.

Faithful to the gospel call to solidify and deepen the community of faith in a time taunted by disbelief, let us in truth and in peace take up together the challenge of reconstruction.



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Following the Spirit in Everyday Life

Joel Giallanza, C.S.C.

Jesus came and stood among the disciples and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:19-22)

The words "Receive the Holy Spirit" are so much more than a record of something uttered over two thousand years ago. In truth, they represent a continuing challenge to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit in our everyday life, and they are a call to nurture a spiritual life. As we reflect on taking up that challenge and living such a life, it becomes quickly evident that we can speak about the Spirit from several perspectives. We can examine what the scriptures teach us about the work of the Spirit in our life and in our world. We can explore the tradition of the Christian community, the church, to understand what it has taught about the Spirit over the past twenty centuries. We can review the doctrinal and theological perspectives that have developed during those years. All these approaches—scriptural, traditional, doctrinal, theological—can provide valuable information for understanding the Holy Spirit. Yet that same information, with its scientific precision, can seem far removed from the reality of our daily life. Reflection on the Holy Spirit could be conve-

niently relegated to an honored but distant place in a museum of quaint religious curiosities.

The Holy Spirit, however, is a gift to be lived. As we accompany others on their spiritual journey, and as we reflect on our own journey, we realize the importance of human experience, of daily life, as a significant means of knowing and following the Spirit. It is precisely within our experiences of everyday life that we discover the presence and activity of the Spirit. Each day is the arena in which the spiritual life unfolds and develops. We need not look elsewhere for opportunities to follow the Holy Spirit; daily life provides an ample supply. These reflections are a reminder that the choice and commitment to discover and follow the Holy Spirit must be ever refreshed in our own life and in the lives of those we serve through ministry.

"DARKNESS COVERED THE DEEP"

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void, and darkness covered the deep. The spirit of God was pulsating over the face of the waters. Then God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. (Genesis 1:1-3)

There are dark moments and dry times in our life—periods when God is not so evident or not evident at all. Beside the actual content of those experiences—whether spiritual or physical, emotional or relational—we struggle with them because we do not

immediately associate God's presence and God's work with darkness. We become accustomed to hearing and speaking about the *light* of faith and of the Holy Spirit. We read in Saint John's first letter, "This is the message we have heard and proclaim to you, that God is light; in God there is no darkness at all" (1:5). The association between the image of light and the person of God is ancient and can be found in every major religion. The Holy Spirit is often associated with the light and is sometimes depicted as fire, a source of light and life and heat.

All this is clear and comforting until we come to those moments and times when God seems terribly distant, when the Spirit appears to have moved out of our lives, when we feel alone and abandoned by God, when it is dark. Then the truth that "God is light" is not so consoling. The wisdom of the kataphatic tradition in the history of spirituality stands firm, but it can be used in an exclusive way when applying it to our spiritual life and to our interpretation of dark and dry moments in everyday life. The exclusive way tends to add an unnecessary and inaccurate modifier. When we say "God is light," we may actually mean "God is *only* light." What, then, of the darkness, the dryness, the times of abandonment, the encounters with the cross? What is our self-talk at such times in our life? Do we assume that God has deserted us, or at least that God should have taken better care of the situation that has developed? The first verse of Psalm 22 reflects our experience at such times: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?"

The strict moralist who tends to classify everything into neat categories looks into the darkness and names it evil. This was the response Saint Teresa of Avila received when she shared some of her mystical experiences with her earliest spiritual directors. Because they were not familiar with such experiences, they saw them only as dangerous territory to be avoided. The sensitive mystic looks into that same darkness and names it God. The difference between the strict and sensitive interpretations lies in faith. Genesis teaches us that "darkness covered the face of the deep. The spirit of God was pulsating over the face of the waters." In the beginning, God's spirit was in the dark; the Spirit was present and active before there was light.

We can acknowledge this truth easily enough. However, dealing with the reality of that truth in the midst of our own experience of darkness is another matter. A stumbling block often emerges from our feelings of God's distance, God's absence, even God's abandonment. It is a curiosity of human nature that feelings do not function on the profound level of the will, as does our faith, yet we often allow them to

have a decisive influence on our reactions and actions. We can and sometimes do treat feelings as if they determine what our will chooses to do.

Reflect for a moment on the opening of chapter 11 in the letter to the Hebrews: "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Add to this Saint Paul's insight that "we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). We can speak of the light of faith, but it is precisely in response to such texts that Saint John of the Cross and other mystics in the apophatic tradition speak of living by "dark faith" and of discovering God in the darkness. Life and discovery are matters of faith, of the will, of choice. We must acknowledge and accept that the Spirit is present and active in our daily life; we must believe, for it cannot be demonstrated as a scientific experiment.

While this may not be completely comforting in the midst of our experience, it should not be unexpected. God has promised us as much through the prophet Isaiah:

I will lead the blind by a road they do not know; by paths they have not known, I will guide them. I will turn the darkness before them into light, the rough places into level ground. These are the things I will do, and I will not forsake them. (42:16)

One interpretation of "turn the darkness . . . into light" emphasizes that the darkness, by God's grace, is portrayed as light; it is not merely replaced by light. With this interpretation, the darkness remains. Can we see the dark times within our own experience portrayed as light? We can, with the grace of hindsight. Recall a dark and dry time in your life, but a time far enough in the past that it does not generate a strong emotional reaction today. Looking at that experience now, years later, ask yourself: How did it change me? What insights or attitudes or perspective have I gained from that experience that have enhanced my relationship with the Lord and the quality of my life? Our response requires faith. If we can name the benefits we have gained and see how they have influenced our present life, if we can embrace that darkness as having been necessary at the time, then we have already touched the Spirit at work in that dark point of our life. We have already affirmed that the Spirit was present and active. And that affirmation strengthens us to acknowledge that the Spirit can be and is at work in the dark moments we experience even now.

Some questions for reflection: Do I believe the Spirit has been and is ever present and active in my life? Do I act on that conviction, or do I wallow in wonder and worry? What prevents me from seeing the Spirit in the dark corners, cracks, and crevices of

my daily life? “The spirit of God was pulsating over the face of the waters.” This is the same Spirit who is present and active within us; the same Spirit who is ever at work in the dark; the same Spirit whom we can know and follow by faith.

“YOU HEAR THE SOUND OF IT”

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. Nicodemus said to him, “How can these things be?” (John 3:8–9)

It is by faith that we can begin to see the works and hear the whispers of the Spirit in the dark times and moments of our life. Seeing those works and hearing those whispers may not provide us with much more than an inkling, an intuition. Nevertheless, we become aware of them, and we can accept them in faith. This awareness and acceptance influence the way we deal with the usual tasks and responsibilities of our everyday life.

Those ordinary tasks and responsibilities constitute the arena in which the Spirit works. Our experience of seeking to discover and discern the Spirit within and around us may very well reflect Jesus’ words in this text from John’s gospel: “The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes.” How do we know about the Spirit’s work in our life; how do we know where it comes from and where it goes? In response to this question, we usually speak about the importance of discernment—that is, exploring with faith various dimensions of our life so we can make appropriate decisions about whatever issues or concerns confront us. In this article, rather than focusing on a particular process or technique of discernment, we will look at the roots of the word itself as a source of insight.

The term *discernment* is rooted in and associated with an intriguing family of words. The first root is from German and Old English terms meaning “to sift or to pass something through a sieve.” And the base of those terms meant “a riddle.” These terms evolved over the centuries; thus, one definition of discernment is to perceive something with the eyes or the intellect; that is, to detect something or someone. As we reflect on this definition in light of our own experience, we can detect something about discerning the Spirit’s presence and activity in our everyday life: that we need to be attentive to the content of our life. Following the Spirit every day requires looking at and embracing our life as it is. The alternative is to pretend that the content of our life is yet to come or that it is really someplace else. To embrace our life as it is does not mean that we stop striving to change or

enhance the quality of our life; rather, we live with the conviction that the Spirit can and does work in our life now, as it is, with all its knotty riddles and necessary siftings.

Some questions for reflection: Do I believe that my life as it is can serve as a sieve for genuine discernment? What insights emerge as I reflect on my own experience of striving to follow the Holy Spirit using the images of a sieve, of sifting, of being confronted with a riddle?

A second root for discernment is from a Latin word meaning “to judge or discriminate or make distinct.” This lends another meaning to discernment: “to perceive or recognize distinction or difference; that is, to distinguish.” This second definition leads us to focus on the value of various realities in our life—persons, possessions, preferences, perspectives—to determine whether they help or hinder our efforts to follow the prompting of the Holy Spirit. Following the Spirit in our everyday life requires some judgments and some determinations of what supports our spiritual life and what sabotages it. Self-knowledge and self-honesty are essential here. Without them we can perpetuate patterns of living and thinking that do not and will not sustain healthy and holy growth and development.

Some questions for reflection: To what realities do I assign priority value in my life? How are those realities related to my spiritual life? What insights emerge as I reflect on my own experience of striving to follow the Holy Spirit, using the concepts of judging and distinguishing?

A third root for discernment is from a Latin word meaning “to explain and to decide.” This provides discernment with the definition “to perceive or comprehend mentally or intellectually,” which points to the meaning we assign to various realities in our life. On the basis of that meaning, we establish goals and take the necessary steps to reach those goals. Apart from meaning, any dimension of our life can drift without clear direction, without a sense of purpose. Our efforts to follow the Holy Spirit in daily life will be effective only if we have given meaning and purpose to the steps taken to reach our goals. We must have some sense of why we do what we do. Once meaning diminishes, so too does the need to continue doing what we are doing.

Some questions for reflection: What are five realities that take precedence in shaping the meaning of my life? Why do those realities continue to be important for me? What insights emerge as I reflect on my own experience of striving to follow the Holy Spirit, in terms of explaining and deciding?

“How can these things be?” Nicodemus asks a particularly insightful question for anyone seeking to

follow the Holy Spirit and striving to take the spiritual life seriously. How can we live every day (a) with the willingness to see and face the content of our life? (b) with the insight to assign value appropriately? (c) with the understanding that meaning must be made and maintained? “How can these things be?” Only by living in faith and with the hope that rests firmly on faith. Hope will not furnish us with clear vision, nor does it even depend on vision. As Saint Paul reminds us, “Hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what is seen? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience” (Rom. 8:24–25). Faith, hope, and patience are necessary for following the Holy Spirit in ordinary, everyday life. Gradually, they fashion us into people of love.

“I SHALL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT”

I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old people shall dream dreams, and your young people see visions. Even on slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my spirit in those days. (Joel 3:1–2)

Through the prophet Joel, God has promised a time of wonderful blessings—a time borne of God’s extravagant generosity, a time of equity and inclusivity. Truly, this is a fresh moment, a time of light, when the presence and activity of the Holy Spirit are almost tangible. Yet this freshness cannot be equated with a clear intellectual understanding of all that the Spirit is doing in our life. What, then, do we see by the light of this time?

This time of blessing enables us to see the gifts we have received; it enables us to see that all people have been gifted. No one is excluded from the Spirit’s touch; no one can claim to have no gifts. Whether or not those gifts are used is another matter. We see that following the Spirit faithfully becomes most evident through the gifts that are shared with others and placed at the service of others. A well-known text from Saint Paul provides important insights for our reflection here:

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (1 Cor. 12:4–7)

At least two points can be drawn from this text. First, consider “varieties of gifts . . . same Spirit, . . . varieties of services . . . same Lord, . . . varieties of activities . . . same God.” This simple truth of diversity in unity may be among the most challenging to address in the spiritual life. God is comfortable with diversity, but it remains a significant task for our

understanding and patience to embrace the fact that so many gifts and services and activities can reflect the same God. Our tendency, at times, is to think that everyday life would be more predictable and easier to deal with if we could simply clone those who follow the Spirit in a particular way. Yet one confirmation that we are growing in our desire and efforts to follow the Holy Spirit in daily life lies in our ability to welcome and celebrate the diversity that is both characteristic of and essential to Christianity in general and to the spiritual life in particular.

Second, let us explore the phrase “for the common good.” The gifts we have received are, by nature, relational. They place us in relationships with others and, indeed, are made manifest through those relationships. The gifts we have are irrevocable; nevertheless, if they are not used, they can weaken, making us less sensitive to their potential within us. Eventually, our interactions with others will give no evidence that these gifts are present at all. A further insight to be drawn from this relational nature is that gifts are confirmed by others, not merely by our claim to possess them. As we reflect on our gifts, the deeper question to be explored is not about their identification but about the means through which we know that we have them. How do we know that we have any of the gifts we claim to have? Our gifts from the Holy Spirit are for the faith community and are confirmed by the faith community; we come to know our gifts within that context.

Some questions for reflection: Can I identify any gifts that I may have allowed to wither within me due to lack of use? If yes, what can I do in response to that? Why do I believe that I have the gifts I claim to have? What evidence do I have?

Nothing about our gifts is a solitary exercise. We need others to confirm and affirm our gifts. Yet there are dimensions of human life and experience that can conspire against us, making it difficult for us to see and accept our gifts or even to hear the confirmation and affirmation of others. The most common conspirators are poor self-image, low self-esteem, insufficient self-knowledge, and a false sense of humility. Any and all of these can have their origins deep in our past. Whatever their cause, they can dull our sensitivity to the gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit. As we become aware of that diminished sensitivity, we may turn to prayer. Even that can become an exercise in frustration, because we may not know precisely what focus to give our prayer at the moment.

Saint Paul offers some encouragement: “The Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26). Prayer

in times of frustration can be a wrestling match or a resting place, depending on our willingness to allow the Holy Spirit to act within us. If we cannot let the Spirit pray within us and for us, then we can spend a great deal of time and energy wrestling with ourselves. The more we strain to see our gifts, the less clear our vision of them becomes. If we can be still and trust that the Holy Spirit has indeed gifted us, then our potential for seeing and accepting that we have been gifted intensifies. We begin to see and hear the truth of how our gifts have influenced and affected others.

Some questions for reflection: Can I recall a time when it was particularly difficult for me to see a gift within me that others told me I have and use? What brought me to the point of accepting that I do indeed have that gift? Are there any gifts that I am told I have now but that are not yet evident to me?

“I shall pour out my spirit on all humanity.” Following the Holy Spirit in everyday life is, ultimately, an act of love; it is to live in love, to do all that we do by love. Jesus’ perspective is clear: “Just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. . . . Just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me” (Matt. 25:40, 45). Our life will be consistent with this perspective, not solely by our wishing it to be so, but also by using our gifts to assure that it is so.

“RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT”

“Jesus said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:22). In giving the Spirit to us, Jesus assumes that we are willing to receive it. Our willingness to receive the gift of the Spirit hardly appears to be something we would question. Still, we will feel the challenge of that offer as we reflect on the Spirit’s role as Jesus describes it. Earlier in Saint John’s gospel, in promising this gift, Jesus says, “The Holy Spirit, whom God will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you” (14:26). These reflections will close with three truths drawn from that text.

First, the Spirit comes in Jesus’ name. The Spirit always leads us to Jesus and to a deeper relationship with Jesus. The Holy Spirit draws us into union with the Lord. When that is not the case, some other spirit is at work. In his first letter, Saint John is clear: “By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Jesus has come in the flesh is from God,

and every spirit that does not confess Jesus is not from God” (4:2–3). Through the Spirit at work within us, we know Jesus and are in relationship with Jesus.

Second, the Spirit will teach us everything. The Holy Spirit is a source of insight and knowledge for us, not in any fundamentalist way, but as a resource for our continuing growth and development in the spiritual life. The book of Wisdom reminds us, “We can hardly guess at what is on earth, and even what is within our grasp we find with difficulty; but when things are in heaven, who can search them out? Who has learned your counsel, God, unless you have given wisdom and sent your Holy Spirit from on high?” (9:16–17). The Spirit is a teacher if we are willing to learn. We might not like or appreciate all the lessons, but no other teacher can communicate them as effectively.

Third, the Holy Spirit will remind us of what Jesus said. Without that reminder, we could forget the story of our faith; we could lose touch with our heritage and hope as followers of Jesus. Not all that Jesus said will be pleasant to us. We may want to forget about denying self and taking up the cross, but the Spirit will remind us. We may prefer a different mathematical formula for forgiveness than seventy times seven, but the Spirit will remind us. We may not care to know who our neighbor is, but the Spirit will remind us. Jesus tells us, “This is the Spirit of truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you” (John 14:17). We will not easily ignore what the Spirit has to say to us and to show to us; in fact, we will have to choose to be deaf and blind to the Spirit’s reminders.

The Holy Spirit does remain with us and is within us. That same Spirit will teach us and remind us that the spiritual journey can never be put aside. It continues to unfold before us in times of light and in times of darkness, in everyday life. “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Do we dare to accept such an offer?



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The Word That Makes Them Nervous

James Torrens, S.J.

The Cities of the Plain (Gen. 18:16–33)

The cities of the plain
fire and brimstone sniffing
look to ten rescuers
the town fool decrying
town-hall injustices
the donor leaving herself
with just one kidney
the boss unjustified, says he,
in trimming workers
the justice who can see
below slick surfaces
the unready lover
who'll not be unjust to life
the unflinching friend
of the justly punished
the cancer patient with a laugh
making us feel just fine
the witness whom the unjust
plan to eliminate
the workman never justifying
a halfway job
the woman asking and knowing
why must the just one suffer
each to the Almighty bent
missing but one
we start to sizzle

The word that makes them nervous is *justice*, actually. About justice a lot of people have been having their say, especially adherents of the duo “faith and justice.” Undeniably the cry of “justice,” as a staple of rhetoric and as fodder for sloganeering, has driven many of its hearers up the wall. Still, it has also been a wake-up call about efforts long overdue—to demand investor responsibility, create universal health coverage, husband nonrenewable resources, battle sweatshops worldwide, and limit the impunity of church and state.

“Justice” as a safeguard for the social order (the blindfolded goddess with her scales, guaranteeing what each citizen is owed) and “justice” as a spur to social action do not by any means exhaust the fullness of the term for the community of faith. In the Hebrew testament, “justice” applies first of all to God, to the sanctity of God. God is the standard of everything “right” and “righteous”—which are older ways of saying and meaning “just.”

The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version (1952), which I have been using for years, offers this sentence about the Deuteronomic law, the Torah, the basis of Jewish piety. Moses asks the people, with obvious satisfaction: “What great nation is there that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?” (Dt. 4:8). The Torah,

Moses is saying, shows its derivation from an upright and generous God.

Ezekiel the prophet, in a chapter vindicating the goodness of God to converted sinners and God's severity to lapsed saints, frames this possible complaint: "The way of the Lord is not just."

"Hear now, O house of Israel," the Lord answers. "Is my way not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?" (18:25). This is what the psalms often say about God: "He judges the world with righteousness, / he judges the people with equity" (9:8).

In the whole course of the Hebrew testament, Abraham is the righteous man par excellence: "He believed the Lord, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). It is Abraham, in a masterly display of Near Eastern bargaining, who argues for Sodom to be spared if ten righteous people, ten of the just, can be found there. He dares to ask God, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" (18:25).

From the above instances we can detect the outward turn that "justice" or "righteousness" gives, semantically, to "holiness"—God's, first of all, and our own. "Justice" applies, in other words, both to conduct and to an inward condition. John R. Donahue, S.J., writing of the Beatitudes in his column "The Word" for *America* (January 21–28, 2002), expresses what we have long perceived: that the term "justice" today speaks more effectively than "righteousness." The latter, he says, "suggests personal piety and represents a religious patois. 'Justice' evokes rather the Old Testament motif of individuals and a community who are in proper relationship to God and neighbor."

Liturgical translation after Vatican Council II, with nudging from the International Commission of English in the Liturgy, has gone in Donahue's direction. Anyone praying the Liturgy of the Hours in English will hear, from the opening psalm, a commendation of "the way of the just," whereas "the way of the wicked leads to doom." Psalm 15 takes up this theme in praise of whoever "acts without fault, / who acts with justice / and speaks the truth from the heart." Old-timers like myself will remember a lapidary phrase of Psalm 92 in Latin that puts this teaching into a vivid simile: *Justus ut palma florebit* ("The just one will flourish like the palm tree").

Wisdom literature—for example, the Book of Wisdom (2:12–20 and 5:1–23), depicts the suffering just person who, when tested by God, remains faithful and so deserves to be called a child of God. The Book of Wisdom opens, however, with some stiff words for those in authority—words that Dante Alighieri would later blazon in Latin across the sixth heaven of his "Paradise" in *The Divine Comedy*: "Diligite justitiam, qui judicatis terram" ("Love justice, you who judge the earth").

When it comes to the requirements and expectations of justice, the Old Testament prophets speak unforgettable. No wonder their sense of justice permeates the religious community today. A continuing theme of theirs is the emptiness of piety and religiosity without respectful and generous treatment of others. Every year, in the readings for Ash Wednesday, Second Isaiah reminds us of the kind of penance God wants from us: "Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free. . . . Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house? . . . Then your righteousness shall go before you, . . . then you shall call and the Lord will answer" (58:6–9).

Amos, as well, is scathing to those who "trample upon the poor and take from him exactions of wheat," those who "take a bribe and turn aside the needy in the gate" (5:11–12). In Amos (5:23–24) the Lord insists, "Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." We can hear the cadences of Martin Luther King, Jr., in that closing sentence.

Jeremiah is no less caustic about those who extol the temple of the Lord but cheat one another and "oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow," besides whoring after Canaanite gods to their own hurt (7:4–6). He is continually espousing "truth, justice and uprightness" (4:2) and decrying "faithlessness," and his indictment does not lack particulars. Jeremiah has very much in mind the biblical, or Deuteronomic, model of the just person: "Run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, look and take note! Search her squares to see if you can find the person, only one, who does justice and seeks truth, that I may pardon her" (5:1). Doesn't this make us think right away of Abraham and Sodom and the search for ten just people? Jeremiah raises a question with God that is echoed by Job, appears in the psalms, and has bedeviled many over the ages: "Why do the wicked have good fortune and traitors rest content?" (12:1). We have heard this put in a more compact form: "Why must the just one suffer?"

It is Second Isaiah who connects the image of the just one most directly to the messiah, the suffering servant and merciful savior: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen in whom my soul delights. He will bring forth justice to the nations. . . . He will not fail or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law" (42:1, 4). According to Saint Matthew, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus proclaims "his law," which he calls the perfection or fullness of the Torah, and he advises his hearers: "Let your justice exceed

that of the pharisees" (6:1). By "justice" Jesus signifies a whole range of attitudes and conduct, a whole conception of the life of faith.

Under the word *dikaios* ("just"), Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* reminds us that "in the background is the fact that God Himself is *dikaios*." The entry continues:

The fact that in Hellenistic Judaism, too, God can be called *dikaios*, the One who is infallibly consistent in the normative self-determination of His own nature, and who maintains unwavering faithfulness in the fulfillment of His promises and covenant agreements, prepares the ground for the crucial religious importance of the term in the New Testament. (Trans. by Geoffrey W. Bromiley)

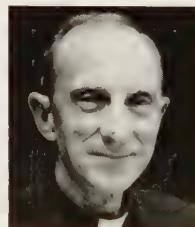
The New Testament singles out Jesus as truly "the just one," whose coming was always in preparation and who establishes the pattern for us all. The deacon Stephen bluntly accuses the Sanhedrin: "Your fathers . . . put to death those who foretold the coming of the Just One" (Acts 7:52). This title for Jesus emerges during his trial, when the wife of Pilate warns her husband not to touch "that just man," and Pilate admits that Jesus has done no evil. On Pentecost Sunday, Peter cries out to the listening Jews: "You denied the holy and just one and asked that a murderer be released to you" (3:14). And in the first letter of Peter we read: "Christ died for sins once for all, the just man for the sake of the unjust" (3:18).

What is the point here, finally? The point is to be clear that from the start of the Bible, in Genesis, we have a pattern of "the just one," the person full of faith. "By faith," says the Letter to the Hebrews, Abel offered God a sacrifice greater than Cain's, and "because of this he was attested to be just" (11:4). Hebrews highlights a shining formula from the prophet Habakkuk: "My just one shall live by faith" (10:38; Hab. 2:4). The prophets stand out for their insistence on religiosity being real—that is, on our extending to others the respect and good treatment of God, especially to those most in need. The coming of Christ in the New Testament centers this image of "the just one" in Jesus and makes our own authentic justness depend on our identification with him.

Perhaps, when it comes to responding to present-day injustices and lack of faith, all of the above only returns us to square one—but that is the genuine starting point. The four gospels make it clear that Jesus did not take up the Jewish cause against Roman oppressors. Neither did he speak out against slavery, a crying injustice of the ancient world. He was not even as blunt on certain moral themes as John the Baptist. Pier Paolo Pasolini's film *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, with its partly Marxist portrait of Jesus as scathing social critic, is not entirely on the mark. On the other hand, Jesus did pronounce on, and act in favor of, respect and equal treatment for women, and he was continually up in arms against religious oppression, against those who imposed unbearable burdens and took unfair advantage of the faithful.

What do we end up saying? That the priorities of Jesus—his emphasis on achieving fullness of faith—are still paramount and deserve our complete attention. And that if we really do attend, we will learn the prophetic tasks that the Spirit of Jesus the Just One has for us among the inequities of the world.

We are back, in the end, to faith and justice—"justice" a comprehensive term with a vertical as well as a horizontal reach, meaning "how we stand before the All Holy," and "faith" connoting not just accepting or concurring in the divine Word but also acting on it, "keeping faith" with our brothers and sisters, avoiding the kind of hypocrisy known as "practical atheism." "Justice," by this account, has more than a terrestrial dimensional and is less than self-righteous. The only real reason for "justice" to make us nervous, then, is misunderstanding, or else a bad conscience. Faith and justice are inextricable; they point to each other. If it is so in concept, why not in fact?



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Seminary Celebrates Its Recent Success

Very Reverend Gerald L. Brown, S.S., Ph.D.

Assumption Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, is a relatively small formation program that helps to prepare priests for eighteen dioceses—mainly in the Southwest and West, though candidates also come from other locations, ranging from Virginia in the East to Washington in the Northwest. Two seminarians are candidates for the Glenmary Home Missioners. Assumption Seminary is part of a collaborative model going back to the late sixties and early seventies. Its seminarians all study English or Spanish at the Mexican American Cultural Center (MACC) and, during pretheology and theology years, commute daily to the Oblate School of Theology for course work in theological and pastoral studies. They receive spiritual, liturgical, and community formation at Assumption. A few students also take courses at other local Catholic universities.

Despite our own and others' efforts to encourage and support recently ordained priests, statistics across the country point out that significant numbers of diocesan clergy continue to leave active ministry in the first five years of priesthood. Seminaries have strengthened the screening process and improved the quality of priestly formation. Dioceses, in conversation with seminaries, have designed programs to smooth the transition into the first years of priesthood. Nevertheless, one out of seven recently or-

dained priests moves into another way of life. Of course, the experience of early changes in occupation and way of life is replicated in other professions and commitments.

As a diocesan priest and a member of the Society of Saint Sulpice, I have been involved for 37 years in seminary formation and in the continuing education of priests. Often enough, in my role as formator or spiritual director, I have worked with recently ordained priests who made the decision to withdraw from active ministry, each with a unique, often sad story to tell. Many are still friends of mine. Most remain actively involved in the church. At this stage in my life, I feel obligated to share some good news. First, I will mention that this is my fourth year in San Antonio and my second as head of Assumption Seminary. During my first two years in this city, I worked in the archdiocesan office for priests, taught at Oblate School of Theology, lived and ministered in a typical Mexican-American parish, and served as a spiritual director for several seminarians and priests.

My good news is that the recently ordained of Assumption Seminary have had an encouragingly positive experience. In the last five full years of ordination classes, from 1996 to 2000, only one graduate out of twenty-three has left the priesthood. In 2001 we ordained seven, and so far all have remained

faithful. These are much more hopeful statistics than the national average of one out of seven departures in the first five years. As far as we can tell through letters, surveys, and anecdotal evidence, our recent graduates, once ordained, were prepared to jump in and deal realistically and effectively with the reality of contemporary priestly ministry. Despite the challenges and pressures of ministry today, they tended to remain faithful. This is not to say that in earlier years we did not have greater losses. In fact, our statistics for the previous five years, 1991 to 1995, look much more like today's national average.

Of course, many factors may explain our positive experience, including the types of candidates we receive, their backgrounds, the pastoral leadership of their bishops, and the support that newly ordained priests receive from fellow priests in their local dioceses. However, I have come to realize, after four years' experience here in San Antonio and a good deal of study and pondering, that a major reason for the higher rate of fidelity among the recently ordained has much to do with the type of formation we manage to provide. In this brief reflection, I will focus on what we are doing here in San Antonio that may be contributing to a higher retention rate. I think seven features help to explain our outcome:

- Strong expectations for proactive bilingual ministry in a multicultural church.
- Emphasis on learning the skills of collaboration.
- The requirement of relating well with women in leadership.
- A predominantly pastoral approach to priestly formation.
- The intensity of formational relationships.
- The reality of a hectic schedule that demands learning how to manage one's time and building a personal life of prayer.
- Location, location, location.

One underlying theme of major importance that helps to explain the impact of all seven factors is the learning of transferable skills. What our graduates learn here is easily used in almost any parish and in any part of the country. Moreover, what they learn matches the type of leadership that is needed today.

MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY

For effective ministry in today's multicultural church, newly ordained priests must go beyond mere coexistence with people from other cultures, beyond broad exposure to diverse customs, and even beyond a capacity for bilingual preaching, celebration, and pastoral service—major emphases of our program

here in San Antonio. To appreciate profoundly the value and worth of other cultures, they need to know intimately their own cultural heritage and family and social history and then, through substantial ministry and friendships, to learn genuinely from the experience of men and women from diverse cultures. All these needs are met and fulfilled at Assumption. Our graduates leave the seminary ready to embrace cultural diversity in parish ministry and to provide appropriate leadership. They acquire such readiness through engagement in varied formational experiences: pastoral studies in language and culture at the Mexican American Cultural Center; philosophical and theological courses in faith and culture at Oblate School of Theology; theological reflection on ministerial experience, which always considers the implications of culture in ministry; an internship program that extends and pushes the limits of the seminarian candidate; and a formation program at Assumption that encourages exchange and collaboration across cultures on the personal, spiritual, liturgical, communal, and social levels.

Assumption's recently ordained priests are not shocked by the variety of expectations, modes of piety, and styles of leadership they find in many of today's multicultural parishes. Rather, they expect to find, and even to encourage the expression of, such diversity. They have already begun to learn the skills of developing communion and collaboration among cultures while respecting and reverencing the unique gifts that each culture brings to the table.

COLLABORATION

Closely allied to effective relational skills across cultures is the need for a well-developed capacity for collaboration in general. In today's church a priest must know and embrace the uniqueness of his particular calling while appreciating and encouraging those who exercise other roles of leadership. Effective pastors need to be able to learn as well as to teach, to follow as well as to guide, to be forgiven as well as to forgive, to listen as well as to speak, to be corrected as well as to correct.

Our seminary model is, at its core and by definition and clear choice, collaborative. It fosters, as a major goal, the development of the attitudes and skills needed for collaboration in ministry. Our diocesan seminarians represent eighteen different dioceses, each with distinct gifts and challenges. They interact daily with seminarians from several religious orders and societies of apostolic life. This mix has several benefits. Through creative interaction with seminarians from diverse charisms, whether in the classroom, in conversation, or in ministry, our students

come to understand more fully their own particular missions as future diocesan priests. They also come to appreciate the unique and necessary role in the church of priests in consecrated life and the importance of mutual exchange among all priests in the life of any local church.

This mixed reality is enhanced by the fact that our seminarians also study with permanent deacons, with nonordained religious, and with laypersons preparing for a variety of other ministries in the church. Discernment to diocesan priesthood is sharpened by the opportunity to hear the poignant stories of these men and women. The seminarians develop and hone the skills of collaboration as they learn together a common theological and spiritual language that promotes unity and vitality in the church.

As might be expected, our seminarians take the bulk of their courses with other candidates for priesthood. Study material can be easily tailored to the specific requirements of priestly leadership, helping seminarians to establish a clear sense of their role and identity as future priests. On the other hand, candidates to priesthood take some courses with men and women preparing for other roles and functions in the church. In the process, they learn the gift of mutual conversation and develop skills of collaboration that will enable them to work comfortably in parish ministry, where increasing numbers of deacons, religious, and laypeople provide leadership and pastoral service.

By the time our graduates enter into priestly ministry, they are prepared for the give-and-take of collaborative leadership. They know their identity as priests; they know and respect the roles of others. They are ready for whatever leadership is appropriate to their level of experience and, indeed, assume a proper responsibility once ordained. Yet they also exhibit modesty, humility, and openness to the experience of others.

WORKING WITH WOMEN

Seminarians today come from many cultures, both national and international, all of which have their own ways of defining the roles of men and women in society. They also represent diverse age groups and varied family and social backgrounds. Many are not prepared culturally or socially for the experience of parish and diocesan life in the United States, where women participate extensively and have significant roles of leadership. Therefore, they need help in adapting to a new situation. If they are to function well as pastoral leaders in our American culture, they must learn how to relate properly and effectively with women, especially those in parish and diocesan leadership. They must be secure in their identity as males

in society; this includes being able to learn from the experience of women and to take direction from women in leadership positions. Moreover, it is helpful to learn how to develop and nurture mature friendships with both men and women and to maintain appropriate boundaries in every relationship.

One of our great strengths here in San Antonio is the presence of outstanding women who serve as formators and teachers. Women teach language and culture at MACC, present courses in theology and scripture at Oblate, play leadership roles in both academic and pastoral studies, serve as supervisors in the field, assist in giving direction and feedback in internship programs, often serve as directors of vocations and seminarians in the name of our bishops, and work as advisors at Assumption in one-on-one relationships with seminarians as they prepare to present themselves for orders in the church.

All of the women in our seminary system are selected because of knowledge and skills in their areas of expertise, but they are also here because of their crucial role as women in the church. They are skilled and effective at the task of formation, making possible a positive experience of collaboration and mutual learning between men and women. They are experts at collaborative ministry in the church and sensitive to the developmental needs of those in their care.

By the time our seminarians leave the seminary as newly ordained priests, they have learned to appreciate the role of women. They have moved beyond any token or reluctant acquiescence, and they welcome future collaboration. Upon leaving the seminary, graduates often express thanks for the growth that has taken place in this extremely important dimension of their lives as candidates for priesthood.

PASTORAL APPROACH TO STUDIES

It should be obvious by now that we place great emphasis upon the pastoral reality our students will face in ministry. They need solid theological and spiritual foundations that will enable them to exercise pastoral leadership for today's church. The church calls all of us to live a trinitarian spirituality that fosters communion among all peoples and to take an active role in Christ's ongoing work of creation, redemption, and sanctification as these deep realities touch the ordinariness of people's daily lives. We need to be actively and energetically engaged in helping to build the "new civilization of love"—a centralizing and energizing theme in the writings of John Paul II—as we enter fully into the new millennium.

At the same time, our graduates must be contemplative in the midst of an increasingly complex and busy ministry. Intense activity often marks the life of

the effective priest, but this same priest has learned to take time for reflection, rest, recreation, and renewal. In this technological age, in which change is constant, priests need the skills of social and ecclesial analysis. They need to know their environment and its needs to help a parish move forward as an interactive community. They need to involve as many people as possible in creating a vision and goals and in finding strategies to implement them. In all this, priests also need to know how to take direction from those in authority while exercising appropriate and sensitive leadership. At their particular level of church leadership and authority, they must be about the task of fostering communion.

Upon entering priesthood, our graduates have the initial understandings and skills for pastoral leadership. They develop these foundations through courses that focus on the types of learning needed for preaching, teaching, and leading in today's church; through well-supervised pastoral ministry that is reflected upon theologically and spiritually; through a strong, pastorally focused internship program; through a final-year integrating pastoral seminar and paper, which involve careful teamwork; and through formation group sessions that progressively help students to assume a diocesan identity, learn the skills of sustaining priesthood, take on the attitudes of the spiritual leader, and make a smooth transition into priesthood.

Assumption graduates feel ready for pastoral ministry as it exists today in their respective dioceses. Of course, they have apprehensions, but they leave San Antonio feeling that they are ready for the next stage in their lives. We encourage them to build into their lives opportunities for further study and reflection, for the development of support among fellow priests and other friends, and for regular communication with their bishops.

INTENSITY OF FORMATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

One advantage of Assumption Seminary is a favorable ratio of formation directors to seminarians—one for every eight to nine students. Our formation advisors work one-on-one with our seminarians. Each student meets with his advisor at least every two weeks in the beginning of his time with us, then every three weeks. This allows the seminarian to develop a trusting relationship with a mentor who can assist him to develop learning goals for each year in the seminary and to prepare himself gradually for successful and happy priestly ministry in his particular diocese. Not only do the students receive encouragement; they also experience the types of challenge and confrontation they might need in order to take on

the mind of the Good Shepherd. They are taught the skills of self-reflection, of giving and receiving feedback, of sharing on the level of faith, and of charting a course for personal and professional development.

Our seminarians also work in another one-on-one relationship of great importance. In spiritual direction, they learn how to find balance in life, how to allow Christ to draw close to them, and how to build for themselves a life of prayer and contemplative reflection. With a spiritual director, the seminarian can share the intimate details of his life as he attempts to take on the mind and heart of Jesus, who gave himself lovingly as a celibate male to all who crossed his path, and who listened to the voice of his heavenly Father in humble obedience.

There are many other mentors who help to shape the mentality and the skills of the candidate aspiring to priesthood: men and women who lead the process of theological reflection, pastoral supervisors, tutors, and teachers who inspire to a deeper level of faith. It is our experience that our men leave San Antonio used to the idea that we need others if we are to grow personally, spiritually, and professionally. Because of our modest size as an institution, Assumption is able to provide quality formation on a one-to-one level. Our men enter into priesthood having been mentored and with an internalized sense of what it might mean to mentor others. They know what it means to be challenged by another and to grow as a consequence. It is our hope that as they go forth, they will seek further mentoring relationships, which will in turn strengthen a type of leadership that is intentional in its direction and capable of increasing in depth.

HECTIC PACE OF LIFE

When I was a seminarian, the daily structure of my life was organized and planned by others. Almost every minute of a seminarian's day was programmed by the system. As a result, many in my generation were not well prepared for the actual experience of ministry and, in some cases, for life itself. Without the strong support of a highly structured community life and schedule, many felt lost. They had not learned how to build for themselves an effective rhythm of prayer or how to structure and manage their time. Many spent years searching for creative ways of keeping personally and spiritually alive.

At Assumption Seminary, our pretheologians and theologians are faced with a much different reality. In fact, even today, their experience is unique in the world of diocesan seminary formation. Each day they are required to commute to and from Oblate School of Theology, twenty minutes in each direction. On some days they commute two to three times a day

(morning, afternoon, evening). This reality, which often feels like a burden, has several advantages.

By the time our seminarians are ordained priests, they have already learned how to manage their time and to build into their hectic daily lives time for personal prayer, contemplation, rest, and leisure. In fact, without such discipline as seminarians, they would not have made it comfortably through the system. This same discipline makes it possible to survive and to thrive as priests in even more complex environments.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Assumption Seminary is located in a simple, lower-to middle-class neighborhood primarily made up of Mexican Americans and is easily accessible to its surrounding environment. This particular neighborhood is very similar to the types of places most of our graduates will find in ordained priesthood—modest neighborhoods in smaller to medium-sized cities or rural towns—even though San Antonio, in its totality, has the ninth-largest population of all cities in the nation. Surrounded as it is by relatively low-income families, Assumption itself is economically a poor and struggling institution. Ironically, this too is an advantage, as seminarians are required by necessity to live and to witness a simple lifestyle. For example, they all take responsibility, in teams, for the cleanliness of our student residence and other buildings, and are assigned to various house jobs and tasks. They learn to live without extravagant amenities and to lead daily lives that are down-to-earth. Over the years, this simplicity of life has become more than inevitable. It is now intentional and will not change, even if we realize our established goals of building a new student residence and bringing all our current buildings into the modern age.

The seminary is not situated in a wealthy neighborhood or at an isolated hill-country estate. At the same time, its location provides easy access to the four major Catholic universities in San Antonio and the city's symphony and other cultural offerings, and also features a diversity of ethnic groups and a variety of urban, suburban, and rural parishes. Thus, while living in a realistically modest environment, primarily Hispanic, our seminarians can be exposed to broader cultural, educational, and pastoral expe-

riences. In a sense, we have the best of many worlds here in San Antonio. From a geographical point of view, our graduates have been well prepared for most venues in ministry.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

What all of this says is that our graduates leave our seminary well prepared for the actual lived experience of priesthood, primarily because they already have adopted the attitudes needed for contemporary ministry and developed the skills they will need. The proper context for learning has much to do with effective and happy ministry in the future. Moreover, concrete experience tells us that what our graduates have learned with us is clearly transferable and, even more important, is sufficient to ensure an effective and smooth beginning in priestly ministry.

It is fair to say that our high retention rate has much to do with the fact that our men are ready for priesthood as it needs to be exercised today, and they have the ability to take skills learned in one environment and transfer them effectively to other settings. Of course, all of our graduates have much more to learn. In fact, they leave here already aware that their lives are unfinished works, still in progress.

I realize fully that each diocesan seminary in the country has its particular strengths and makes its own unique contribution. In fact, as a Sulpician and as one who has had wide national and international experience, I can attest to the extraordinary gifts of sister institutions. I simply want to say that much can be learned from the experience here in San Antonio. There is something about the combination of factors I have described that helps to account for our high retention rate these past several years. At the same time, as an institution, we too are a work in progress. We can do even better what we already do well.



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Renewed Search for Priestly Identity

Reverend Stephen J. Rossetti, Ph.D., D.Min.

Recently, on a Sunday morning, a newly assigned pastor arrived for the first time at his large parish. While the priest vested for the Sunday liturgy in the sacristy, the head Eucharistic minister was assigning the stations to the other Eucharistic ministers for the distribution of communion. After the assignments to the laity were made, the man looked at the new pastor and, in a voice that all in the sacristy could hear, said, "Father, you will be giving out communion in the choir loft." He added, "That is so people will see there is no difference between the priest and everyone else."

Words similar to those of this Eucharistic minister have been echoed in some places in recent years as a kind of mantra in the Catholic church: "There is no difference between the priest and everyone else." With such a statement often repeated, it is not surprising that some priests speak of a crisis of identity. Indeed, if the priest is no different, then it must follow that he has no unique identity.

There are many signs that such a struggle with identity has been occurring in the presbyterate. A few months ago at a national Catholic convention focusing on the priesthood, much discussion centered on the rising pastoral workload, the decreasing number of priests, and the aging of our priests. At the end of the plenary session, one of the priest delegates said, "I can stand more work; what I can't stand is this ambivalence about who I am." It was a stunning comment that left the room in a hushed silence. If

this priest's experience is representative of the experience of the wider presbyterate, then a more pressing problem than the reduced numbers of priests handling an increased workload is the need to delineate and inculcate the identity of the priest.

Another sign of this struggle with priestly identity is a recent trend among some newly ordained priests. A significant percentage of younger priests appear to have a strong connection with external signs of the priesthood. For example, some wear cassocks and birettas; a few even wear capes; and some young priests address each other formally in private, as "Father," even though they are friends. I believe that external signs of one's vocation are good, and I support their use. At the same time, these behaviors of some young clerics stand out as unusual, and this phenomenon deserves some thoughtful attention.

Instead of lauding or criticizing such behavior, we might first try to understand it. What does it tell us about the priesthood today? One possible interpretation is that an insistence on external signs of the priesthood may be a reaction to the lack of an inner sense of identity among our priests—a largely unconscious expression of the need to discover an accurate perception of who the priest is.

While the use of external signs of priesthood may facilitate this process, such signs will not be fully effective unless our priests, and the laity, are able to complement these external signs with an inner appropriation of a unique priestly identity.

ANTICLERICALISM FOLLOWING CLERICALISM

If the priesthood currently suffers from identity confusion in the minds of both priests and laity, the first step in addressing this confusion is to investigate its genesis. Two possible causes quickly surface. First, we are in a period of anticlericalism, in which the charism of the priesthood is being downplayed. I heard renowned church historian Monsignor John Tracy Ellis say that every period of anticlericalism in church history has been preceded by a period of clericalism. Indeed, the current phase of anticlericalism was preceded by a time of clericalism. For example, in the previous era, people believed that the priest was better than other people and had a a “higher calling.” It was therefore believed by many that the priest was holier, or at least had a better chance than the laity to achieve sanctity in his life.

The idea that priests were “better” led to erroneous assumptions—for example, that priests were immune to psychological problems and impervious to mundane human struggles. It did not occur to many people that priests could suffer from depression, anxiety, and the more distressing kinds of sexual problems. Thus, when allegations of misconduct and other psychological defects surfaced publicly, they were initially met with skepticism by some of the faithful. “How could this be?” some could be heard saying in disbelief. “He is a priest!” The idea that priests were beyond human problems has since been soundly thrashed.

Today the danger is to go to the other extreme—to posit that priests are psychologically inferior and defective compared with the laity, who lead a more balanced life. I recently heard a number of such insinuations, both privately and in the media. The suggestion today is not only that a celibate, male Roman Catholic priesthood is not a higher calling but also that it is defective and abnormal. In such a climate, it is not hard to understand how a disparaging of the priesthood, and a concomitant weakening of priestly identity, would occur.

EQUAL DOES NOT MEAN SAME

One of the current mantras of our anticlerical period is the statement, “Priests are no different than anyone else.” This was what the head Eucharistic minister said to the new pastor when he told him to distribute communion in the choir loft. It is clearly a reaction against a “rank ordering” of vocations in a previous clerical era. The Second Vatican Council spoke of a universal call to holiness. Our society places great value on equality. This is good.

However, in the United States, “equal” is often assumed to mean “the same.” We reject “discrimina-

tion” in all its forms and vehemently claim that all are equal. Thus, many conclude that there is “no difference between the priest and everyone else” because we believe that all are equal and thus the same.

It is indeed true that God has created all people equal. But their equality does not derive from their being the same. There are a plethora of differences: some people are smarter than others; some have different skin colors than ours; and we are regularly faced with gender-based differences.

Throughout the sacred scriptures, we see evidence that some men and women were called to unique relationships with God, not because they were better than others but simply because God chose them. For example, the prophets repeatedly asserted that they fulfilled a prophetic role, a unique mouthpiece for God, because God himself had chosen them. Amos said, “I was no prophet . . . I was a shepherd and a dresser of sycamores. The Lord took me from following the flock, and said to me, Go, prophesy to my people Israel” (7:14–15). Amos was a prophet because God chose him. The writing of the great mystics, such as Juliana of Norwich and Catherine of Siena, clearly indicate that God who chose them to receive unique revelations, which they were then to share with others. In God’s eyes, we are all equal, although clearly we are not all the same, and God does not shed the same graces on everyone.

If the priesthood is to recover a sense of its own identity, it must eschew the mantra that priests are the same as everyone else. While they are decidedly human and thus inherently flawed because of sin, as we have been painfully reminded these past few years, the truth of the priesthood is that it is different and carries a unique and powerful grace for the good of the People of God. Priesthood has its own identity that shapes the priest and offers a unique and necessary gift to the church. At the same time, we must quickly add that this does not make the priest better; rather, it makes him different.

CHURCH OF SIX SACRAMENTS

There is a second trend that has helped to give rise to the current mantra, “Priests are no different than anyone else.” This is the important recovering of the centrality of the sacrament of Baptism.

In the post-Vatican II era, Baptism has found its rightful place as central to the Christian life. It is the sacrament of Baptism that begins the life of Christ in the individual, and it is upon this sacrament that the rest of Christian life builds.

As a result, the truth of the “priesthood of the faithful” has been emphasized. We are all “priests” and thus called to share in the one priesthood of Jesus

Christ. As a natural conclusion, the work of all the baptized has been stressed. All the faithful are called to share in the work of Jesus. As a result, there has been a necessary blossoming of lay ministries and an increasing involvement of the laity in the work of the church. This is a grace for all the people of God.

However, as we have consciously emphasized the priesthood of all the faithful and their rightful place in continuing the work of Jesus, we have unwittingly deemphasized the ordained priesthood. Some priests are floundering with understanding their rightful roles, with so much of their previous work now being done by the laity. Confusion about priesthood is as prevalent among the laity as it is among priests.

The church today almost seems to be a church of six sacraments, not seven. The six sacraments are preached and taught, but the uniqueness, clarity, and efficacy of the sacrament of Orders are rarely mentioned. In an effort to emphasize Baptism and the universal priesthood of Jesus, the truth of the sacrament of Orders has all but vanished from our ecclesial consciousness.

I believe that an understanding of the universal priesthood of Jesus is important, as is the multiplication of lay ministries. Not only does the church need lay ministers; the ministry is the rightful place for those laypersons who choose it. However, this necessary development of the lay ministry ought not to take place at the expense of the ordained priesthood. The two need to coexist and be interrelated; both are integral to the life of the church.

The two priesthoods—the priesthood of the faithful and the ordained priesthood—are not different merely in degree. It is not that one has a bit more of priesthood than the other. Rather, they are different in kind. Both share in the priesthood of Jesus, but they do so in different ways, and they have different identities. They are not the same.

FATHER, PRAY FOR ME

It is time for us to recover a proper sense of the sacrament of Orders. It is important that we rediscover the identity of the priest, not only for the sake of our priests but for the good of the entire church. We must state clearly that although the priest is not better, his charism is decidedly different. It behooves us to begin to delineate what some of these differences might be. The question arises, Where might we begin to look for this unique priestly identity?

One place to begin the search is in a simple experience that every priest has daily. Each day a member of the laity says to the priest, with a sincere and earnest heart, "Father, please pray for me" or "Father, please pray for my loved one." If one subscribes to the

mantra "The priest is no different," then such requests are meaningless. If the priest is truly no different, he might justly respond, "What good are my prayers? Go, pray for yourself." I have heard of priests giving such an insensitive response. But, day after day, week after week, in parishes, schools, and hospitals throughout the world, priests are beseeched to pray for a myriad of intentions. Why would so many of the laity ask for their prayers? Is it because priests are thought to be holier? It may be that some still believe that priests are holier and that this is simply a dying remnant of an earlier clerical era. But I think that the reality is much more profound and rightfully enduring.

The truth is that the people of God believe and expect the priest to have a unique relationship with God. I believe that they expect the priest to be part of an "inner circle," a kind of "friend of God." In ancient times there was a group known as "Friends of Caesar"; Pilate appears to have had the distinction of belonging to this group (John 19:12). In early imperial times, "friends" of the emperor were often the emperor's official representatives. Presumably, such friends had a unique access to this important person. In a similar way, the faithful expect priests to be official representatives or special friends of God.

When the faithful are in need and desperate for God's ear, they will beseech a priest and others to intercede for them with God. The Catholic church, while exhorting all to have a direct and personal relationship with God, has encouraged the use of intermediaries; we regularly implore the assistance of the Blessed Virgin and the saints. While it is rarely mentioned publicly, many of the faithful pray to their deceased mothers, fathers, and other loved ones for intercession and help. This is natural and, I think, a good practice. While we are all to nurture a close and personal relationship with God, our religion is not simply an individual and vertical one; the role of the community and spiritual leaders are important. We should often ask others for help, particularly those who might be of unique assistance.

One could easily argue that it is the priest's first and most important role to pray for the people. If God is the source of all grace and blessing, and if the priest is called to be a friend of God, then his first and most important ministry is to intercede with God on behalf of the people. Bishop Timothy Dolan, in his excellent work *Priests for the Third Millennium*, relates a story from his early days of priesthood that illustrates this truth. He was called to the hospital to visit a man in his 60s who was about to undergo risky surgery. The man assigned tasks to each of his sons present in the hospital room. One was to go over the man's will; another was to take care of business

arrangements; a third was to care for the man's wife. At that point, Father Dolan asked, "And what am I to do?" The response was swift and insightful: "Immediately twelve eyes glared at me, all surprised that I had even asked such a question and . . . the father quickly responded, 'Why, Father, you pray, of course!'—as all the sons nodded in agreement, astonished that I had even to ask."

It is no accident that Canon Law (Can. 534) stipulates that the pastor of a parish must celebrate at least one mass every Sunday for the people. I am personally convinced of the primary importance of our ministry of prayer. Each morning I begin the day by praying for the people whom I serve, particularly in that most efficacious prayer, the Eucharist. It is my most important work. It is what the people of God most often ask me to do for them. They say, day after day, "Father, please pray for me."

PRESENCE OF PRIEST AS GRACE

I recall making the point to a group of priests at a convocation that we priests are called to have a unique friendship with God. At that point, in front of the entire assembled presbyterate, a priest asked, "Are you saying that a priest is better than other people?" Again, we see a variation of the modern mantra: "Priests are no different than anyone else."

How could one respond to such a challenge? The thought came—and I shared it with those gathered—that the scriptures give us a clear model in this regard. Jesus loved everyone and called everyone to salvation. However, there were twelve men with whom he had a particularly close relationship. For three years he walked with them, ate with them, and spoke to them plainly, not in parables. They were not chosen because they were better than others. In fact, we do not know why he picked them over others. The scriptures are embarrassingly clear about the apostles' flaws, but the men were Jesus' choice. Jesus offered to them a kind of intimate friendship that he did not offer to others.

It is no different today. Priests are not better than other people, but they are, I believe, called by Jesus to have a unique friendship with him and thus a unique friendship with God. The people expect such a friendship, and truth to tell, we priests expect to have such a relationship as well. We earnestly desire to be friends of God.

It is no accident, then, that much of what a priest does in the course of his ministry is simply showing up. He is invited to receptions, ball games, dinner parties, and picnics. He spends his days visiting the sick and the homebound, the schools and the nursing homes. He offers words of consolation; he adminis-

ters the sacraments; but first, and of critical importance, he shows up. Because of his presence, the faithful feel blessed.

It should be added that in these days of rising demands on the priesthood and declining numbers, priests will necessarily show up at fewer gatherings. It would be problematic for a priest to measure his effectiveness by how many functions he attends, a not uncommon tendency. His mere presence in the parish is showing up, and he will likely find that attending a few well-selected occasions is more efficacious than maintaining a frenetic calendar of activity.

The faithful see the presence of a priest among them as a source of grace. Their confidence in us should embolden us to lay our hands on them when they are sick and to pray for their healing. Their confidence should inspire us to pray with them. We should not be reticent to say in public the time-honored phrase, "May God bless you."

The priest is a kind of sacrament with a small "s." As a friend of God and official representative ordained by the church, he symbolizes what is sacred and is meant to be a conduit of grace, often in ways of which he is not even aware. While the priest is consciously aware of his human faults and limitations, his presence is to be a source of grace for the community to which he is sent. This truth is easily obscured by excessive activity and overwork on the part of our priests today, a significant danger. If a priest feels that he must constantly be working and implementing programs, then he is probably missing a deeper truth: God is the source of all grace, and our most important work is to let him shine through us. We should often beseech God's blessing on ourselves and on all the people. We must first fulfill our calling to be friends of God. The scriptures remind us that the twelve apostles first spent three years with Jesus before they engaged in their public ministry.

ASPECTS OF FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

The priest might rightly ask, What does this friendship with God mean for me? Is there a model for such a friendship? The nature of such a relationship is best seen in the lives of the apostles. I offer the following illustrations of six aspects of this friendship:

As noted previously, a friendship with God follows only upon acceptance of the divine initiative. It is God who chooses, and God does not reveal the reason for the choice. It is simply a mysterious, divine prerogative: "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you" (John 15:16).

The apostles leave everything to follow Jesus. Our God is a "jealous God" (Ex. 20:5). The price of this friendship is complete self-surrender. Such a demand

makes the practice of clerical celibacy more understandable. While some point out that the apostle Peter was married, the scriptures give the clear impression that he left all behind to follow Jesus. We are to be like the person finding the buried treasure in the field; he gave up everything for this treasure. The scriptures note that he did so with "joy" (Matt. 13:44). We too should be full of joy in the divine treasure for which we have sacrificed everything.

Jesus speaks to his friends "plainly." As the scriptures tell us, "And when he was alone, those present along with the Twelve questioned him about the parables. He answered them, 'The mystery of the kingdom of God has been granted to you. But to those outside, everything comes in parables'" (Mark 4:10-11). Furthermore, Jesus tells his disciples, "I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). It is clear that Jesus reveals to his friends directly and plainly the living truth of God. The sacred "deposit of faith" is not best described as a series of timeless statements. It is better conceived as an ongoing, divine communication revealed to the church. The "deposit of faith" lives only when it is planted in the soil of a relationship or friendship with God. We ought to cherish, and never undervalue, this living gift given to God's friends. It is from this gift received that the priest is then called by the church to preach. He is the ordinary and official preacher of the Word.

These twelve special friends of God enjoyed a unique relationship to Jesus. They traveled with him. They were his daily companions. They ate with him. One laid his head on Jesus' chest. They enjoyed a regular discourse with him: they had direct access to him and often asked him questions. Then as well as today, the friends of Jesus had an enviable familiarity with him. Today's friends of God ought to be found often in prayer, opening themselves to this regular and familiar discourse with God.

Any true friendship involves both joys and sorrows. It is the same in a friendship with God, only more so. A divine friendship carries with it a peace that the world cannot give (John 14:27) and a joy that is "complete" (John 15:11). Its blessings are inestimable. At the same time, Jesus promised his disciples, "The cup that I drink, you will drink" (Mark 10:39). Any true friends of God must carry the cross of Jesus. If we have not suffered so, we cannot truly be called friends of God. Priests are acutely aware of the sufferings that today's friendship entails.

The friends of God continue the ministry of Jesus. While all the faithful continue the work of Jesus in some way, the priest as a friend of God is called to engage in the ministry of Jesus directly, explicitly, and

totally. Jesus told Peter three times, "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15). The priest most explicitly and fully continues the life of Jesus in the Eucharist. The Eucharist and the priesthood are inseparable.

PRIESTHOOD AS GIFT TO CHURCH

In our frenetic era, priests suffer from the increasing demand to do more and more work. Perhaps we feel compelled to give in to these unrealistic demands because we have lost a sense of who we are. Now we try to plug the hole of our lost inner identity with a crushing ministerial pace. It is an unsatisfying and frustrating endeavor. No amount of external signs or work can substitute for a solid inner identity. Before the priest *does* anything, he *is* something. He is called to be a friend of God. An official representative of the church and of God, he is called to be a sign of hope. People ask him for prayers because of who he is.

Today the priesthood is under siege from many directions. One of these is the result of our own sins. It would not be good to underestimate the damage that our weaknesses can cause and have caused. Our sins can obscure our friendship with God. Indeed, we priests are often discouraged by our own sinfulness and failure. It is hard for us to reconcile our blessed calling with our human limitations. We think that true friends of God should be spiritual "giants" whose achievements are towering.

We ought to return to the basic truth that we are not God's friends because we are better than others or because we are spiritually advanced. Rather, we are God's friends because God has chosen us to be so, and the efficacy of our friendship might be found more in our human weakness than in our spiritual gifts. Saint Paul learned this from God, who told him, "My grace is sufficient for you. For power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:9). Human weakness is the conduit for the power of God.

It is humanly hard to hold onto both truths simultaneously: first, we, as priests, are sinners and no better than anyone else; second, we have been given a gift of inestimable value. This gift of priesthood is not a personal attribute that the priest wears for his personal exaltation or his personal benefit; rather, it is a gift to the whole church.



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New Program for Healthier Clergy

Raymond F. Dlugos, O.S.A., Ph.D.

In an article in the Summer 2001 issue of *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Gerald D. Coleman, S.S., and Christopher J. Sellars wrote:

At some level, all priests are broken, hurting, and alone. It is part of the human condition. When a priest's spirituality weakens, he becomes fragile, ripe for a host of personal difficulties. If his life and ministry are shattered, he is still a priest, but he is a hurting priest who needs rediscovery of his wholeness and holiness. He is in need of strong support to keep his fragile priesthood from breaking. When a priest's life and ministry are shattered, all priests in a sense share in this brokenness. For this reason especially, a fragile priest needs to rediscover his wholeness and holiness by listening to and learning from other priests.

Coleman and Sellars ask the question, "Can something be done to help these priests before they fall too deeply, or perhaps to offer a safety net that would make the bottom less deep?" They propose that an answer lies in the existing ministry of Retrouvaille ("Rediscovery"), in which married couples assist couples with troubled relationships. Coleman and Sellars propose that a program incorporating opportunities to listen to the experiences of other priests, accountability to a group to which one can belong, and willingness to share one's own story and self with rigor-

ous honesty could provide priests with the chance to rediscover grace, love, community, health, and holiness in their lives and work.

At the Retrouvaille International 2000 Council Meeting in Cleveland, Ohio, a group of priests involved in the Retrouvaille ministry discussed the possibility of developing such a program. As a result of that discussion, a committee was formed to continue exploration of the feasibility and direction of such a program. Without difficulty, it was determined that the principles and techniques that have helped men and women who have experienced disillusionment and misery in marriage to rediscover love, meaning, and commitment through Retrouvaille could also bring much-needed healing and renewal to priests. We chose to name this program Earthen Vessels in the spirit of 2 Corinthians 4, which captures so well our struggle to carry the treasured gift of priesthood in our fragile, often broken humanity.

The committee consists of seven members, all of whom have been involved in the work of Retrouvaille as members of presenting teams or participant-observers. Many committee members also have experience as participants and presenters in Marriage Encounter, a program designed to help good marriages get better. Earthen Vessels will draw on the principles of both Retrouvaille and Marriage Encounter to avoid

the assumption that one needs to be on the verge of abandoning ministry or behaving in a highly destructive fashion before seeking the support of others and the skills for more fulfilling lives. Several committee members have significant experience with the twelve-step spirituality that Coleman and Sellars suggest is an integral element of a healing ministry to priests. Others have extensive experience in pastoral counseling, psychology, and spiritual theology. Using the principles of Retrouvaille and Marriage Encounter as a basic framework, they have drawn on their experience and expertise to develop a model for an experience of rediscovery for priests.

In addition to their own experience of priesthood and ministry, the committee members have been exposed to priests and other ministers experiencing considerable brokenness. At times such distress is too obvious to ignore, as when it manifests itself in debilitating anxiety or depression, addictions, or behavior that is destructive or exploitative. Outstanding treatment programs, such as those provided by the Southdown Institute (Aurora, Ontario, Canada), the Institute of Living (Hartford, Connecticut), the Saint Luke Institute (Silver Spring, Maryland), and Guest House (Lake Orion, Michigan), exist to care for individuals experiencing such distress.

However, many priests continue to perform their work without causing scandal or otherwise drawing attention to themselves while suffering in silence and secrecy. While not overtly doing damage to the Body of Christ, neither are they experiencing the joy or passion that may have been present at the outset of their generous vocational response. Like the elder son in the parable of the prodigal, these priests may dutifully carry on without appreciating their value as true sons. Their suffering may be due to an overriding sense of being taken for granted, overlooked, and even abandoned by the God and the church to whom they once gave their lives with generosity and love. In place of a passionate desire to serve others for the sake of God's reign, they find themselves burdened with deep resentment that at times emerges into their consciousness as seething anger. Ashamed of this feeling and therefore unable to express it openly with any satisfaction, they may bury it, along with much of their zest for ministry, under blankets of overwork, unfulfilling distractions, food, or alcohol. Earthen Vessels, then, is primarily directed at priests who are struggling to sustain and energize their lives and ministry in the face of the ordinary disillusionments, disappointments, and suffering that are inevitably part and parcel of their lives. Earthen Vessels will attempt to teach skills for intimacy with oneself, with appropriate others, and with God in an atmosphere of communal and fraternal support and prayer.

While we acknowledge the need among all those involved in church ministry to have opportunities for reflection, honesty, and healing, we note the particular need of ordained priests to share and seek healing in the company of other priests. Our long-range plans include the development of similar programs for all ministers, but Earthen Vessels is currently being developed as a ministry to ordained priests. Our plan is to initially invite priests already involved in Retrouvaille to participate. Once a group of leaders has been developed, we hope to provide opportunities for all priests to experience Earthen Vessels.

Although Earthen Vessels will make important use of many of the concepts and principles found in the Retrouvaille and Marriage Encounter ministries, there will be important differences. Like Retrouvaille, Earthen Vessels will entail an initial commitment of a few days away from one's ordinary responsibilities. We are proposing a model of a midweek sabbatical, beginning on Tuesday evening and ending at midday Friday, so as to leave participants free for weekend pastoral responsibilities.

In Retrouvaille, couples are presented with a stage model of marriage, and the stages of Romance, Disillusionment, Misery, and Commitment are delineated for them. Priests participating in Earthen Vessels will be invited to reflect upon their experience of life and ministry in light of the pattern of the Paschal Mystery, including the movement from the joy of Holy Thursday and the Lord's Supper through the agony of the cross, the silence of the tomb, the stirrings of life that are Easter, the long process of transformation and change leading up to the Ascension, and finally the mission experience of Pentecost.

PROBLEM OF LONELINESS

As the committee explored the needs of priests, three kinds of conflicts emerged as the primary drains on a priest's energy and zeal—namely, conflicts with loneliness, sexuality, and power. Loneliness is an inevitable aspect of a priest's life, at the same time similar to and different from the existential loneliness that represents a universal longing of the human heart. Efforts to alleviate loneliness, even if successful in assuaging its pain, deprive a priest of the self-awareness that can result from allowing one's honest emotional response to loneliness to come to consciousness. Loneliness always hurts, and the pain of loneliness evokes different emotional responses at different times and situations and in each unique personality. For some loneliness evokes anger, for others fear, for others sadness, and for still others shame about personal inadequacy. How one responds to the emotions that accompany loneliness has an

enormous influence on one's behavioral choices. Allowing oneself to be honest with others about the experience of loneliness will not eliminate loneliness in the lives of priests but does make that experience available for the transformative power of grace.

Sexuality is a primary and pervasive experience of all living beings. Ordination to the priesthood, with its required promise of celibacy, does not change the essential masculine or sexual nature of a priest. However, priests experience their sexuality within a climate clouded by theological, spiritual, and cultural taboos that communicate expectations about how they can and should be sexual. Within this climate, the potential is rife for distorted attitudes to arise toward oneself and others as sexual beings. From these distorted attitudes easily arise emotional responses to the experience of sexuality that can lead to behavior destructive of one's integrity and exploitative of others. A common response to this threat to personal integrity is for a priest to function in a compartmentalized way to separate his sexuality from his priestly identity. Compartmentalization is a form of disintegration and can be expressed in the form of living a "double life" or through emotional and sexual numbing. With either response, a priest does not allow his sexual vitality to constructively influence and enrich his pastoral ministry.

Priesthood as Holy Orders is the exercise of ecclesiastical power. Beyond the juridical scope, priests tend to be endowed with significant power by virtue of their position in the community. However, priests are mandated by the gospel not to exercise power as dominion over others but to be the servants of all. Like the vow of celibacy influencing sexuality, this exercise of power under the mandate of service can lead to distorted thinking that is destructive simultaneously to the priest himself and to those over whom he exercises his power. At the same time that a priest has power over others, he is himself subject to enormous ecclesiastic, social, and cultural control. Therefore, a priest's experience of his real power and authority tends to be masked by the expectations arising from his vow of obedience and his call to service. Without honestly acknowledging the reality of the power that he possesses, a priest cannot transform that power by grace into authentic loving service and obedience with life-giving freedom.

INTIMACY WITH OTHER PRIESTS

Earthen Vessels will invite priests to rigorous honesty with themselves and with each other, especially

in regard to their experience of loneliness, sexuality, and power. However, following a crucial principle of Retrouvaille, it is important to note that honesty does not mean the same thing as the revelation of information that properly belongs only in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The self-disclosure that Earthen Vessels will invite therefore does not carry the expectation that priests will unburden themselves of guilt over past actions and find the relief of absolution from their peers. Rather, the program will attempt to teach skills that make it possible for a priest to allow other priests to know him as he is: vulnerable and strong, needy and powerful, sexual and celibate. Rigorous honesty in Earthen Vessels will involve the risk of exposing one's pain at the experience of unmet needs, as well as the passion that would drive a priest to sacrifice his life for the sake of love.

Earthen Vessels will follow the Retrouvaille and Marriage Encounter model: the sharing of personal experiences and theological/spiritual/psychological reflections by a team of presenters, all of whom will be priests themselves. Those participating will be taught the skills of honest communication with self and others in a manner similar to the dialogue process taught by Retrouvaille and Marriage Encounter. This will include direction on how to access one's honest emotional experience and identify one's genuine needs and longings by writing alone in response to carefully prepared questions. However, we feel that instead of sharing those written reflections with one other person in a dyadic format, it is more beneficial and realistic for priests to have various forms of sharing. Therefore, at times, participants will be invited to share with the entire group assembled, at other times in groups of six or three, and at still other times in private prayer. They will also participate in liturgies that express their personal and collective experiences of the program.



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A Missionary's Life

Cyril Lovett, S.S.C.

In 1989 I was working in Salvador, Bahia, in northeast Brazil, and participated in a workshop on spiritual direction given by Bill Barry, S.J. He and I had some good conversations about my experience of culture shock, and he encouraged me to write about it for *HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*. I gave this a lot of thought but somehow could not put my thoughts into essay form. In 1990 I read an article that Bill had written with Sheila Campbell, M.M.M., and Judith Dieterle, S.S.L., entitled "Culture Shock Afflicts Missionaries" (*HUMAN DEVELOPMENT*, Winter 1990). Rereading that article today, I find it as valid as I did then.

In more recent times it has become clear to me that I have in fact expressed, in poetry, some of my feelings arising from culture shock. So I offer three poems in this article as an expression of one person's struggle with the challenges of learning to be at home in a new culture, with particular reference to the difficulties inherent in beginnings and endings. I am writing especially for the relatives, friends, and colleagues of those who respond to the vocation to be missionaries in other lands. By understanding something of the stages that their friends may be going through, they may be able to support them.

LANGUAGE SCHOOL

The first poem dates from immediately after our language-school experience in Brazil. My ten col-

leagues and I were part of a new Columban mission to Bahia. All of us had been missionaries in at least one country other than our homeland before. We had spent five months at CENFI, the ecumenical language school sponsored by the Brazilian National Conference of Bishops, located in Brasilia. The language-school period is a time of great tension for most missionaries. It seemed, at that initial stage, that much of the success or failure of our career as missionaries would depend on our capacity to communicate well in the local language.

We were a group of thirty-five men and women of many nationalities, and as soon as classes started, distinctions began to be made. Some had already taken classes in Portuguese before they arrived. Some who spoke related languages—Spanish, Italian, and French—also had a head start. Some had studied Latin, which helped in recognizing the roots of words. Some were from China and Japan and spoke little or no English. Some, like our group, had at least experienced the challenge of learning a foreign language once before.

We were divided into class groups following the school's initial testing of our capacities, and this generated a good deal of competition and resentment. A certain level of competition can help motivation for some, but it can be disastrous for others. The truth is that different individuals learn new languages at different speeds. I know now that the level of fluency

with which people leave the language school is not the best indicator of who will speak the language with the greatest fluency three years later. Those who speak a language best are those who never cease to perfect their skills. But as the late Bishop Benny Tuditud was fond of saying, "The spoken word is the last resort in human communication." People are tuned into our attitudes toward them before they hear our words.

Most missionaries come from cultures where self-esteem is closely related to levels of skill and competence. Learning a new language, not being able to communicate even with children, makes us feel deskilled in general. Hence, apart from being at sea in a new culture, apart from adapting to new food, music, lifestyle and climate, learning a new language brings a great deal of tension. If we already speak the language of a country before we go there, we may feel less awkward and vulnerable, but we may then be more reluctant to learn from the local people and end up with paternalistic attitudes, which can be truly disastrous.

We did have one great blessing as Columbans. We had agreed to hold a weekly group meeting at which each one of us could express our difficulties and frustrations and be supported by the others. We would meet for an hour and a half. If nobody needed that time, we would sit together in silence—but the times of silence were few. Brasilia, with its supermodern architecture, is not a pedestrian-friendly city. To meet ordinary people and practice our smattering of Portuguese, we had to travel thirty kilometers by bus to smaller satellite cities. Hence, after five months, we had had enough of language school, and we were anxious to move on to the next stage, regardless of how adequately we were able express ourselves.

Second Time 'Round

I'd hoped it would be easier.
Just because I knew beforehand
that there must be a letting go,
a conversion to the reality of these people,
and a reversal to the stuttering, stumbling
infant stage of communication:
knowing it in advance I'd hoped
would make it easier.
But a stranger is a stranger,
helpless, dependent, vulnerable,
and it shows in my thirst for letters—
the life-giving contact with those who
love and understand me—
so I admit:
it's no easier the second time 'round.
Knowing what was coming
maybe I had hoped to control it . . .
so that I would not be totally at sea?
so that my confusion and poverty would not show?

so that I could approach them
from a position of power?
When only the poverty
of being who I am here and now
enables me to remove my sandals
before this people.

EARLY MONTHS IN MINISTRY

The second poem dates from the first six months after language school. This period had its own particular difficulties. We had chosen to be assigned individually to various local priests and missionaries in order to observe firsthand the specific ways of doing ministry in our area of Brazil. Some had a happier time than others, but we all felt the strain—a different but related strain to that experienced in language school. Now we were indeed immersed in Brazilian culture but still unable to communicate adequately, still making elementary mistakes, still being laughed at by the children, who would ask their parents, "Why does he talk in that funny way?" Action—any action—would, we thought, have justified our existence, but the great demand of that time was simply to be present and to learn humbly from the people. We were strangers and newcomers: we were being asked to be vulnerable, to be patient, and to allow the local people to be our teachers. They would teach us what they thought we needed to know, when they thought we were capable of learning.

It was a time of strain, but also a time when we could begin to learn the value of simple presence as a valid mode of being missionary. The secular clergy with whom we stayed were kind and helpful, but even the foreigners among them had apparently forgotten how lost they must have felt during a similar period of their own lives.

Like the language school period, the following six months is a very lonely time for individuals, and a time when friends and relatives at home need to be generous and to write often. Until new friendships can be established, old friends must show their faithfulness by frequent communication.

We had split into two different diocesan groups, but each group kept up the weekly or biweekly meetings, which continued to be supportive and necessary. I feel a particular sympathy for lay or priest missionaries who arrive alone in a country or on a particular assignment. In such times of difficulty, we pray and search the scriptures for some indication that Jesus may have had some similar experience, and even the very strangeness of this new situation can work toward bringing us closer to him as he walks with us. Access to a spiritual director is a particular blessing during such turbulent times.

The In-Between Time

To be human means to live from day to day
searching, discerning the way forward,
inchng toward a clearer sense of identity,
a feel of the mission to be accomplished,
trusting that the means will also be revealed.
When identity involves divinity as well as humanity
as it did for Jesus, I imagine
a growing sense of belonging in God,
warmed, supported, strengthened by the Father's love
an urgent need to share that love
since such love grows by being shared
and a consciousness of latent powers
to be used someday . . . somewhere . . .
Meanwhile, the in-between time,
wait and just be, patience,
all will be revealed. . . .
The time came suddenly, simply,
a crisis for friends at a moment of celebration,
. . . it was Mary who guessed, intuitively, and prompted
action.
John remembers Jesus' hesitation
but she knew she was right. . . .
All mission must be lived as search
and patient waiting,
immersed in the reality of others,
living out the love that must be shared;
trusting that gifts are given, and the grace
to respond to each situation.
Mission that cannot be foreseen . . .
only lived

ACCLIMATION

Like so many others before me, I eventually passed through these early stages and began to appreciate the privilege of being in this new culture. I worked for eight years in a parish setting. We knew enough from our previous mission experiences to press for assignment to the poorest areas, so we had the blessing of working in an area where almost everybody was poor. Yet even in such areas, some have a little more than others, and these were the people who monopolized my time; I had to consciously set aside a time to visit the others, whose conditions were truly miserable. To tell the truth, I had to force myself to visit such areas, because they underlined my true helplessness in the face of extreme poverty.

During my final six years in Brazil, I was blessed to be able to live in an area "occupied" by the people, and I was free of any administrative role. In that setting, it was easier to be simply a friend among friends. I count my fourteen years in Brazil as among the happiest of my life.

Then, for various administrative reasons that were difficult for us to accept, our society's general council decided to close our Brazil mission. Endings are always difficult. Leaving Brazil broke my heart. I did not shirk the leave-takings but wept with the people and acknowledged how they had enriched my life. I had come to evangelize, and I left as one who had been evangelized by them. For months afterward, I was very angry about the closure of such a life-giving mission. Finally, a wise counselor helped me look at the hurt that lay beneath the anger, and I was able to let the anger go. Some time later, I wrote the following description of the endings and beginnings of a missionary life.

Matters of the Heart

In building they now use girders
made of layers of wood glued together,
a weak basic material which in composite form
turns out to be stronger than steel.
I thought of that recently remembering my friends.
A missionary is, by calling, a traveler
destined to be uprooted and replanted
uprooted and replanted,
in alien soils that gradually become home.
Over and over with faltering heart I start anew
yearning for the friends I have left behind.
Then time, physical distance, frequency or lack of
communication, form a fine mesh which sifts the
quality of
those relationships until only the gold is left.
At each uprooting, part of my heart remains behind
yet I carry parts of other hearts within me.
Do I give the impression of a heart in bits?
Well, sometimes it feels that way, but
could it be that I'm growing a composite heart
which may just turn out to be
a stronger, sturdier model by far for the journey?
And there's more . . .
This sharing of life and love
this welcoming and letting go,
this reaching out by virtue of the love
given and received that lives on in us,
could this be what is meant by
"made in the image and likeness" of the Trinity?



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